

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 26.

Price, Five Cents.



THE PARTY OF HORSEMEN WERE FAIRLY UPON THE LYNCHERS, AND, WITH WILD, SAVAGE YELLS, POURED IN A MURDEROUS FIRE FROM A DOZEN REVOLVERS.—(CHAPTER LVIII.)

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Jesse James' Exploits.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER LVIII. THRILLING EVENTS.

"Pull away, boys!"

"Up with ther cuss!"

"Let him swing!"

"Send him to ther devil whar he belongs!"

Such were some of the exclamations of the excited crowd as they pulled upon a rope which passed over the limb of a tree, the other end being fastened to the neck of a human being, who was struggling, and writhing, and cursing in his soul, if not with his tongue, as the cord tightened on his throat and choked him till he grew black in the face.

It was a little way up a rocky hill that rose high and frowning above a mining village, which, mushroomlike, had sprung up, so to speak, in a single night.

The sun, just on the point of setting behind a western peak, was glinting across a rough wilderness, and over the roughly-built village, and clearly defining the excited inhabitants, as, collected in a body, to witness a revengeful and horrible execution, they swayed to and fro on the mountain side, a portion of them being women and children, who, if they did not shout in their rage as fiercely as the men, certainly made no loud protests against the murderous work before them.

Farthest down the hill, however, and near a dwelling of more pretension than its neighbors, stood a pale, delicate, beautiful girl of twenty years, who

was half-supported by the strong, manly arm of a finely-formed, handsome young man, to whom she was, in turn, clinging with trembling eagerness, as if to keep him at her side.

"No, no, Arthur," she said, with quivering lips, "you shall not go; you shall not leave me; you shall not touch that strangling rope. You have done enough in seizing, binding and bringing the man back here for trial and judgment without becoming one of his voluntary executioners."

"But remember, Myra, what the scoundrel did to you—seized and bore you off into the forest, and only for the providential fact that I was out hunting with my dog, and that he crossed my path, there is no telling what would have been your fate."

"I know it, Arthur," she shuddered, "and, thank God, you were there to save me."

"But, ha! look! What is that?"

A sharp bend of the hill to the right, about on a level with the spot where the kidnaper was being lynched, shut off the view in that direction; so that a party of half-a-dozen horsemen were able to approach the body of the crowd without being seen; and the first the people of Mineville knew of their approach they were fairly upon them, with wild, savage yells, pouring in a murderous fire from a dozen revolvers, handled by desperadoes who knew how to make every shot tell.

Confusion and consternation on the part of the lynchers were the immediate result.

As the bullets flew into the crowd, killing some and wounding others, the men, completely taken by surprise, fell back down the hill, with cries of dismay and terror; while the rope over the limb, being freed from the murderous hands that had been pulling on it, went up with a rush, and the strangling man on the other end came down with a thud.

"Quick, boys!" shouted the leader of the assailants, a well-formed, vigorous-looking man, with a reddish brown beard coming down below his mask, "up with our man and away before the hell hounds have time to rally against us."

He threw himself from his horse as he spoke, and, darting to the man on the ground, cut the rope around his neck with a long, formidable, glittering knife.

He was instantly joined by two other masks; while the three remaining mounted men, facing their horses down the hill, kept up a rapid fire from their revolvers on the panic-stricken and still flying villagers.

"He's not dead—he breathes!" cried the leader of the assailants, as he bent down and partly lifted the victim of the lynchers. "Quick! up with him and on to my horse."

The two addressed sprang to the work required, and in less time than it takes to record the fact, the lynched man, still gasping for breath, was put upon the beast that was to bear him away, and the owner of the animal was sitting astride of the horse and supporting his charge.

"A close call," he observed, with a grim smile. "Thirty seconds more would have been too late. Away now with coming night to make good our escape."

He turned his horse, as he spoke, in the direction from which he had come, blew a clear, shrill whistle, and the next moment was dashing away over the rough ground, with his little bodyguard closely following in single file.

The frightened villagers now suddenly stopped their flight with chagrin and rage depicted on nearly every face.

It had all been done so suddenly that they had not had time to think.

"By the blasts of Satan!" yelled out one, who had not only been foremost in the lynching business, but in putting space between himself and foes when the assault was made, "ef I don't feel jest now like a cussed coward fool you kin shoot me for a skunk."

"We've all acted like er lot er sneaks to run away from half-a-dozen shooting bullraggers, and leave them to bag our game," cried a second, writhing with the pain of having had two fingers shot away.

It was, in fact, the universal feeling among the villagers that they had conducted themselves in a most pusillanimous manner, and each and all were ashamed of the part they had played in flying at once from their assailants, and leaving the latter masters of the

ground long enough to snatch their victim from their grasp.

And yet it was not real cowardice on their part, but the impulse of startled surprise—that sudden instinct to preserve life which makes the bravest thing that lives spring back at the first sight or shock of danger.

And they had had enough to startle them, for the desperadoes had come upon them without warning, like a thunderbolt hurling down destruction from a clear sky, yelling, firing, wounding and killing, with no chance for the assailed to know whether their foes numbered six, sixty, or six hundred.

Surprised in a murderous work, with what seemed a charge of cavalry full upon them, with loud yells and whizzing and stinging bullets, they would have had to be more or less than human not to have given way.

And then, too, two men had been killed outright, and from ten to fifteen others wounded, four of these quite seriously.

The men now crawled together again excitedly.

There ensued lamentations and rage, and many swore to have revenge.

But on whom and where?

Who were these daring assailants? and where were they next to be found?

"It looks to me like the daring, devilish work of the James gang, Jesse and Frank James, and their ungodly crew," exclaimed the clear voice of Arthur Braceland.

This handsome and intelligent young man was the private secretary of William Weldon, generally called Squire Weldon, the father of Myra Weldon, and the principal owner of the mine and village.

Mr. Weldon was a millionaire, over fifty years of age, gray-haired, and a feeble invalid, who seldom crossed the threshold of his own dwelling.

He was a widower, and Myra was his only child and heir.

Arthur Braceland, his private secretary, was his confidential business agent and mouthpiece abroad.

The young man was in love with Myra, as everybody knew, and, with the exception of the envious and jealous, everybody predicted it would soon be a happy match.

The kidnaping of Myra—the capture, snap trial and attempted lynching of her abductor, culminating in the terrible rescue—were among the most exciting incidents the little village had ever known.

Nothing before this had ever occurred to make the young lady afraid of venturing out alone, especially to a kind of summerhouse, which had been built at her instigation, over a large, flat rock, with a spring of clear, cold water, that bubbled up at its base and trickled away down the hill, glistening and glittering in the light and sunshine like a thread of silver.

This was a favorite resort for Myra.

And it was here at this resort, while reading a book, on the eventful day our story opens, that Myra had had a smothering hat suddenly pressed over her mouth, and been choked and gagged before she could utter one single shriek for help.

She had been captured by one man, who had then quickly dragged her to his horse, concealed in some bushes below, and had mounted her in front of him, and ridden away without being perceived by any one.

Fortunately for the young lady, her kidnaper, in making his way through a thick wood, in which Arthur Braceland was hunting, had ridden directly into his arms, and he had been captured, and she released in the manner already mentioned.

When Arthur Braceland, as just recorded, announced to the excited crowd, mostly of rough miners, who had left their work to hang a villain, that he suspected the James gang of being their murderous assailants, they became excited to frantic fury, partly through rage, partly through fear, and partly through cupidity.

They were furious at the fact of having been put to flight by a mere handful of ruffians, whom they might have killed or captured, and been enriched by immense rewards offered for the bandit brothers, dead or alive, and of whose return for further mischief or revenge, they would now have to be in constant dread.

"What makes yer think them war the Jesse James gang, Mr. Braceland?" inquired a rough voice.

"Because the attack was like what I've heard of their dare-devil ways," answered the excited young man; "and because I don't believe there's another devilish crew in the whole country that would dare what they did with so few men. I counted only six, all told."

"And yet they made us all hump ourselves like slinking cusses," growled another voice.

"What's ter be done now?" cried one.

"Ef we don't foller 'em, and cut thar pizen black hearts ouden 'em, they'll most like ter be er mosing back yere and er ripping out this er willage," shouted another.

"If you want to follow them, I'll join you," said Arthur.

"Ef you'll lead us, we'll make up a party and start on thar trail at daylight," rejoined a tall, muscular, black-haired, swarthy man of forty, who had had experience as a hunter, and was named Abner Bliss.

"I'll lead, if it be the will of all, and you shall be my lieutenant," resounded Arthur.

"Good, good!" cried a chorus of voices.

Then the men at once set to work and organized a company of fifteen, to be well armed with guns, revolvers and bowie knives, to follow the daring scoundrels, and either kill or drive them from that section of the country, and this for fear otherwise of

their return for further evil work, perhaps to murder the inhabitants and plunder and burn the place.

Arthur Braceland had, on the first assault of the bandits, hurried his fair companion, Myra Weldon, into her own dwelling, and left her with her father.

Then he had rushed forth against her will, leaving her pale and trembling, to act where he might be needed.

Now he found time to go back to her, to tell her of the new venture in which he was about to engage, and bid her farewell.

Hastening back to those who were soon to be his followers, Arthur set to work to organize his little band, and see that every one was properly armed with good weapons and plenty of ammunition.

Then the horses were selected from those best fit for traveling service, and suitable saddles fitted to their backs.

They were to wait until morning, in order to be able to follow the trail.

A little before daylight everything was ready for a start.

The men were waiting beside their saddled horses for the order to mount, and their leader, Arthur Braceland, was with them, pacing slowly up and down in a grave, thoughtful mood.

Suddenly two or three wild shrieks rang out upon the still night.

All started in eager alarm.

"The sounds came from the direction of the Weldon mansion," cried Arthur. "And there is a light as of fire. Follow me, men!"

All rushed away in that direction.

As soon as they came in sight of the handsome dwelling they saw flames of fire bursting from the windows.

Then, from a dozen quarters, resounded the cries of "Fire, fire, fire!"

With his whole thought and soul concentrated upon Myra and her worthy father, that they, too, must be saved at all hazards, Arthur Braceland reached the burning dwelling, burst in the outer door, and rushed into the blazing, stifling rooms in search of them.

He found bewildered and frightened servants, but no Myra, nor could they tell him anything about her.

He knew her room, and flew to it, and searched it; but she was not there.

He found her invalid father, and helped him to the open air, just in time to save both their lives, for a moment after the roof fell in with a crash.

"Miss Weldon has perished in the flames!" cried Arthur, horrified.

"No," said a voice near him, "she's yonder, being carried off by horsemen."

"Where? where? for God's sake, where?"

"Yonder, yonder! the light of this fire will give you a glimpse of her."

"Oh, yes, I see—I see! God's curse on her abductors. After the villains! To horse, men, to horse! Good-by, Mr. Weldon; I'll save her or die!"

Five minutes later Arthur Braceland had left the village of Mineville, at the head of fifteen determined horsemen, and plunged into the darkness of the surrounding country, in hot pursuit of the one he loved.

The villains, whom he supposed to be the James boys and their desperate gang, had succeeded a second time in carrying off the beautiful Myra.

CHAPTER LIX.

A KIDNAPING PLOT.

Arthur Braceland was nearly right in his surmise concerning the assailing desperadoes.

They were really some of the James gang of ruffians, and were led by Jesse James himself, though Frank James was not with them.

In their retreat they went back over the route they had come.

This was a dangerous shelf along the face of a precipice, in some places so narrow that two horses could not go abreast, with a wall above and a gulf below, where one misstep would plunge beast and rider down to certain death.

But few of the bravest would have cared to make the venture which these daring riders did.

But their guiding motto was, "Risk everything and fear nothing," and no human beings ever more strictly lived up to their daring principles.

As they rode back over this perilous route, the leader, Jesse James, supporting the limp form of the man he had rescued by literally snatching him from the jaws of death, his followers kept a sharp lookout behind them, half expecting to be pursued, and really wishing they might be, that they might again empty their reloaded firearms and spill more human blood with but little risk to themselves.

Just as it began to grow dark, they came to a steep, ugly ravine down which they carefully picked their way, coming out upon an almost level plain, a portion of which was covered by a thick wood.

Into this wood they went, and finally drew up at an old log building, that looked as if it might have been erected for sheltering cattle in inclement weather.

"Here, boys," gruffly spoke Jesse, reining up his horse with a blasphemous oath, "take this infernal fool inside, don't spill him, and stretch him out on the soft side of a plank. He'd have been served right if he'd swung till the devil got him, but for the honor of our oath and fraternity I couldn't let him go that way just now."

The fellow had so far revived from his rough treatment that, as he was lowered to his feet, he made an effort to stand alone, and, rubbing his marked neck with his hands, he grumbled out:

"Say, Jesse, what's the matter with you?"

"Matter enough, Jim Cummings," was the surly reply. "What in blazes were you trying to do, all alone by yourself, that got you into such a scrape?"

"Why, you see, Jesse—— Say! anybody got a flask of whisky along?"

"Here you are," said one of the others, handing him a small bottle. Cummings took a long pull at it, smacked his lips, and, with a satisfied grunt, observed:

"That's the stuff, and a hanged sight better than cold water every time."

"Well, now that you've got your tongue again, Jim, let's know what it's all about," said Jesse. "You see, when you scooted off alone yesterday, you allowed you were going to discover something that would give us a good haul, and I thought you went to see your chances about robbing the bank we were talking of, and so we waited round for you to come in again. Finding you didn't come last night, we began to get a bit uneasy. We thought as how you might be in trouble, or else was giving us away, and——"

"Hold there, Jesse!" interrupted Cummings, "I hope you haven't such a low opinion of me as to think I'd play traitor?"

"Well, I don't know who'll play traitor," returned Jesse, with a terrible oath; "but I know traitor is played sometimes by scamps least suspected; and I know if I have any good reason to think one of our boys is going to do that dastard business, I'm going to blow his black heart out of his vile carcass, if I'm killed the next minute myself."

"The only safe way for the traitor then would be to kill you a minute sooner, Jesse," returned Cummings, with a kind of chuckling in the throat, intended for a laugh.

Quick as lightning, Jesse James whipped out one of his revolvers, and fairly thrust its muzzle into the face of the man he had rescued at the peril of his life.

Jim Cummings started back in alarm, and one of the others impulsively seized the arm of the outlaw chief, and drew the weapon aside.

At that instant the piece was discharged, but no one was hit.

Jim Cummings instinctively thrust down his hand to where his own revolvers were usually kept, and then remembered they had been taken away from him at the time of his capture.

Had they been in place, it is just possible the murderous leader of bandits might have met his doom there and then.

"Would you murder me for a mere joke, Jesse James?" he then asked.

"No, Jim; but I want to warn you that some jokes are dangerous. The thing went off from the sudden jerk of my arm."

"Well, I'm no traitor, I want you to know."

"I didn't think so, Jim, or I wouldn't have rescued you. Come, here's my hand, and let's call it settled."

"There you are, captain."

They shook hands, and the others breathed easier. "The fact is," proceeded Jesse, "we weren't looking to find you in Mineville; for what's up there, in that dirty little place, with its smutty crowd, worth going for? But your man Friday, Jake Blossom here, was out on a scout, saw you in the hands of the rag-muffs, and fetched in word just in time for us to get there before you kicked the bucket."

"And a thousand thanks to you, and all the rest of my brave comrades for your gallant rescue," cried Cummings.

"Now, tell us how it was."

"I will."

"But first let us get in and have some grub, for I'm as hungry as a starved rat."

The old log structure was the present headquarters of the little band while in that section of the country, where they had come to perfect their plans for robbing a bank about fifteen miles distant, or holding up a train a mile or two nearer, whichever circumstances might determine.

They went in, and soon had a collation set on a rough table, around which they sat on rough benches, and there Cummings told his story in his own way.

"You see, boys," he began, "the way on't is this: About six months ago, while nosing around for what I might find, I strolled out hereaway, and stopped at a tavern over night in Mineville, and thought it a mean, miserable, nasty place for a gentleman of my cloth."

"What was your cloth, Jim?" questioned one of the freebooters, with an ironical laugh.

"A slouch hat, a farmer's blouse, and cowhide boots," grinned Jim.

"And yet you were too nobby for the grimy slob?"

"I felt like a kitten in a hog-sty."

This caused a roar of laughter.

"Well, get on," said Jesse, gravely, for there was little humor in his composition.

"Well," proceeded Jim, "I stayed there over night, swearing I'd get away early in the morning; but when I set out to do so, I saw a young lady that struck me all of a heap—light hair, blue eyes, a rose-bud mouth——"

"Oh, cut it off, Jim!" interrupted a man named Miller; "you're getting too high on the spooney."

"Who's telling this story?"

"Get on—get on. We'll all give in that the girl was an angel in every way—goose wings and all."

"Well, boys, after I'd seen her I didn't want to leave the village unless she'd go with me."

"I soon found out she was Squire Weldon's daugh-

ter, and that Squire Weldon owned the village and was worth a million."

"W-h-h-ew!" was whistled.

"Where does the old cuss bank?"

"I don't know; I only know that when I found out that this girl had a lover that she's wanting to marry, I knew I'd have no chance at courting her, and so I'd have to plan to run off with her without asking her leave."

"I left the place, pretending I was going on to the next town to look for land; and when I'd got out of sight of the village I turned and come back in a roundabout way, and hid in a thicket not more'n a hundred yards below her father's dwelling."

"There I stayed for hours before I got a sight of her again, and then she came down to her summer-house that was between me and the dwelling."

"The weather was cold, and she didn't stay there long; 'but,' thinks I, 'that will be the place for you next summer, my ducky; and as it's pretty much out of sight of the village, if I can only catch you there some fine day, and get your mouth stopped with chloroform, or a gag, I may get you away without much trouble.'"

"Well, I hung about there, in that region, for three or four days, and then I put out and left things for another time, and the fact is that I'd almost forgot all about it till I got sight of the place yesterday, and then I left you and thought I'd try my chance if I could find one."

"It all turned out just as I hoped it would."

"I caught the girl in the summerhouse, clapped my slouch hat over her face and mouth, gave her a good choking, and then got her away without any trouble."

"The trouble, you see, came afterward."

"While I was riding through a thick wood, who should I plump against but her—lover, who got the drop on me before I could do anything, knocked me from my horse, bound and took me back to the cursed village, where they pretended to give me some sort of a trial, and then strung me up. You know the rest."

"And what do you propose to do about the matter now?" asked Jesse, as Cummings finished his recital.

"Well, I want to kidnap the girl, and I think it will pay."

"Pay who? and what?"

"Why, me, you and all hands."

"How so?"

"Why, her father's rich—worth a million, they say. He's a sickly old cuss, and she's his only child, and so what wouldn't he give to get her back?"

"That's so. And so you propose to get her and hold her for ransom, eh?"

"Well, maybe if I had her all to myself, I could make love to her and get her to marry me."

"In which case we'd not get anything, eh?"

"In which case I'll bind myself to give you five thousand dollars apiece when I get the old man's money."

"Good, good!" cried the others. "Let's make it a go."

"If she wouldn't marry me, then I'd hold her for ransom, make the old fellow shell, and we'd all divvy up—that is to say, I'll do all this, if you'll all turn in and help me through."

"When do you want to begin?"

"Now! What better time than to-night?"

"What! with the village all in an uproar, as we left it?"

"Why, yes—just the thing. They've all got something to talk about, while getting ready to follow us, as maybe they will, and will not be looking for any more deviltry on our part. By sneaking around the plain, and hiding in the thicket where I hid my horse before, it will be no great feat to get up to the Weldon mansion, and bag the girl before she knows what's hurt her. What do you say, Jesse?"

"I say, Jim, where there's money, I'm in."

"All right, then. It's a go."

"We're with yer," cried the others, and they began at once to make their preparations for the new adventure.

CHAPTER LX.

THE ABDUCTION AND PURSUIT.

It was considerably past midnight when the little band of outlaws stationed themselves in the thicket already mentioned at the foot of the hill below the summerhouse and mansion of Squire Weldon.

Securing their horses, and leaving two men in charge, the five others stole up singly to the village to reconnoiter, and then meet for concerted action, just in the rear of the Weldon dwelling.

Under the excitement of going in and out by the frightened servants, one of the doors of the house had been left unfastened, and discovering this, Jim Cummings and Jake Blossom finally stole into the mansion for exploration, leaving their three companions on guard outside.

Cummings had with him a bottle of chloroform, of which he made such good use that in less than an hour the whole household was under the influence of the drug, and he was master of the situation.

Then, without removing Myra Weldon at once, he and Jake proceeded to search the house for valuables.

In an ordinary, old-fashioned safe, which gave them no trouble to open, they found between five and six thousand dollars in silver, gold, banknotes and Government bonds, and jewelry worth, at least, as much more, all of which it is needless to say they seized upon with a scarcely suppressed cry of delight.

Under the intense excitement of the night, Myra Weldon had not retired as usual, but had thrown her-

self on the bed, in the same garments she had worn through the day, had fallen asleep, and in that condition had been found by her abductors, and had then been chloroformed into insensibility.

Having finished their robberies, the two men now turned to her, threw around her form a handsome wrap of her own, and quickly bore her down and out to their companions.

A few words from Jim Cummings to Jesse James explained the whole state of affairs.

"And where's the old man?" asked Jesse.

"Oh, he's up there, taking a chloroform snooze, like all the rest of 'em."

"And why not make a clean job of the whole thing, fire the building and burn them all up together?"

"Good!" returned Cummings; "that's an idea worthy of our old leader, Quantrell, himself."

"Then," added Jesse, "as she's the only chick of the father, she'll come in for his whole fortune, and we'll be sure to make her pay for our trouble before we've done with her."

So Jim and his man Jake, transferring their living burden to their companions in crime, to be taken down to the horses, went back, worked fast, and soon had the whole mansion on fire.

One or two of the stupefied and frightened servants recovered consciousness in time to shriek for help, and to thus bring Arthur Braceland and others upon the scene, while the murderous scoundrels were making good their escape with their prize.

In a former chapter Braceland was left at the head of his men, moving forward into the darkness in pursuit of these bandits, a distant glimpse of whom had been seen by the light of the fire.

There was no certainty in the pursuit beyond the point where the ruffians had been seen to disappear; and, therefore, on reaching that quarter, it was thought best not to push recklessly forward, but to wait till daylight, which was now not far off, and so make sure that they were on the right trail.

Arthur groaned, chafing like a caged tiger, as he thought of the fearful condition of Myra, to have to wait here, in this awful suspense, while the murderous scoundrels were putting miles between the two parties, and bearing Myra Weldon away to some horrible doom.

With the arrival of daylight the trail was found, and Abner Bliss, as guide, led the way, and followed it at a rapid gait.

The trail skirted the base of the hills for some considerable distance, and then led across an open plain, several miles in extent, to another ridge of hills, which Abner at once declared was the most perilous for mounted men of any in that region.

Arthur had bethought him to bring along a small telescope, and he now made use of this to sweep the whole scene.

Away in the distance the naked eye could just perceive a small moving body; and this body, when brought under the inspection of the glass, resolved itself into men and horses, which he knew to be the outlaws.

"There they go," he said; "and if they enter upon the hills, and we keep on over this open plain, they will surely see us, and, perhaps, lay an ambuscade for us."

"Yer right," said Abner, reining up his horse, "and ef you takes my advice we'll not go on that way. No doubt they've took this er way fer the purpose of seeing ef they'd be follered, and if they don't see they're follered some time to-day they'll most like git off thar guard."

"What, then, do you propose?"

"Wall, we mought scoot along the base of these yere hills, eyther keeping in the bushes, or so close to 'em that our beasts won't be seen, and so work around in that way."

"But the hills bend so as to more than double the distance," said Arthur.

"Yes, that's so. To crawl around the way I says, will make it a good fifteen or twenty mile."

This course they took, to avoid being seen by the kidnapers; the route proved long, slow and tedious, and by the time they reached a point near where the outlaws had entered the wood, they and their beasts were both tired and hungry.

Here it was thought best to make a noonday halt.

A little up the hill, off from the plain, a fine spring was discovered, and good grazing all around it.

Here the horses were watered and tethered, while the men partook of some bread and meat, which the forethought of the scout, Abner Bliss, had provided and brought along.

"Now, cap'n," said Abner to Arthur, "ef you'll jest stay yere quiet with the men, I'll scout around to whar them rascals entered the hills and see what I kin diskiver."

In a few minutes he was off, little dreaming what was destined to happen during his absence.

CHAPTER LXI.

PREPARING FOR A MURDEROUS SURPRISE.

Myra Weldon did not regain her senses until the bandits were crossing the plain.

Then she roused up in a bewildered manner, which gave her no distinct comprehension of where she was and what had happened.

She was mounted on a horse, in front of Jim Cummings, whose strong arms were supporting her, and her first impression was that she was being held by her lover and borne away from some fearful peril.

"Oh, Arthur, what is it?" she feebly uttered, opening her eyes and glancing around her, like one awaking from a troubled dream. "Where are we?

and what has happened? Have you again rescued me from that terrible man?"

"Yes, my dear, it's all right," returned her captor, with an inward chuckle, "and I'm just taking you away to a place of safety, where we will have nothing to do but make love to one another."

The strangeness of his voice roused up Myra with a feeling of fresh alarm.

Glancing nervously around at the men and horses, and then up into the hard face, that she could dimly perceive in the light of the stars, she quickly and sharply demanded:

"Who are you? What does this mean?"

"Keep quiet, my dear—I tell you it's all right—and you are along with one who loves and will protect you. Don't have the least bit of fear; you are not going to be harmed; and these parties you see around you are all your friends."

"Oh, my God! what awful thing is this?" almost shrieked Myra.

"Keep quiet, Miss Weldon, and don't make any disturbance. It's only a little pleasure excursion, a good kind of a joke, and you'll soon understand all about it."

Here Myra, half-frightened out of her senses, gave vent to a piercing shriek.

"Stop that business, Jim," called out Jesse James. "We don't want any such kind of fun out here, even if there's nobody to hear."

"Shut up, girl," said Cummings, roughly clapping his hand over Myra's mouth. "I told you, if you kept quiet, you'd not be hurt; but if you go to making a fuss for nothing, you'll soon find treatment that you won't like."

Myra groaned in her terrified anguish, at comprehending that she was now in the hands of these men, and that she was entirely helpless.

Then she relapsed into silence, and in this condition was borne forward by the bandits, without giving them any further trouble.

They reached the hills we have already mentioned, which were wild, rough and rocky, full of precipices, large, angular ledges, with thick bushes growing here, and stunted trees there, and with black, frowning cliffs in all directions—presenting, as Abner Bliss had stated, an almost inaccessible surface to mounted men, especially from the side nearest them.

Jim Cummings and Jake Blossom had visited this quarter before, however, and had discovered a narrow, winding route, or path, by which daring horsemen might ride to the summit.

"Here, Jake Blossom," said Jim to his right-hand man, "just you lead the way now, and don't make any mistake."

Jake did so, and they all followed him in single file.

In this manner, after a toilsome struggle of half-an-hour, they reached the summit of a large, flat rock,

which crowned the hill and commanded a view of the whole surrounding country, and especially of the whole route they had come over, even back to and beyond the village of Mineville.

Here they dismounted for a rest, and to scan the whole scene and keep a sharp lookout to see if they were followed.

Back of them a little distance on the hill, was good grazing for their horses, and there the latter were secured with long ropes or lariats.

Then the men met for consultation.

"Now, boys," said Jim Cummings, "I think I've got a pleasant surprise for you."

When they had all gathered around him he continued:

"When Jake Blossom and I went into old Weldon's mansion we didn't lose any time. We just bagged over six thousand dollars in cash, and a lot of jewelry, which I am now ready to divide."

"Hurrah for Jim Cummings," was the general cheer.

This division, which was then made, put the whole murderous crew in the best of good humor, and every one was willing to swear that Jim Cummings was a trump and an ace at that.

The consultation which followed resulted in the decision that if no pursuers were discovered during the day, they should descend about nightfall, and take their fair prize to the house of a farmer named Stokes, who, with his wife and daughter, were people they knew they could trust, and where Myra Weldon could be secreted and safely kept till such time as a final disposition could be made of her case.

Then a lookout was stationed, with a good glass, where he could scan the whole intervening space between their present halt and Mineville.

Here the lookout scrutinized the whole face of the country so closely that, notwithstanding the precautions which Abner Bliss had taken to keep out of sight of the robbers, he and his whole party were espied slowly working their way around the base of the hills.

When he gave this information to the others they all chuckled at the idea of soon having their pursuers in a trap.

The latter, as we know, halted near the place where the outlaws had left the plain, and so close under the hills that they could not, they thought, be seen from the position of the kidnapers, who deputed one of their party to reconnoiter.

He soon returned with correct information as to the position and condition of the pursuers.

"That's the kind of talk for me," grinned Jesse James; "and now I propose to give these smart boobies a lesson that they won't soon forget. While they are waiting there and making their calculations about the big things they are going to do, we'll just give them a lesson they won't soon forget."

"What will we do with the girl?" asked Cummings. "Shall we leave her under guard?"

"Guard? no—we want every man. She'll keep; she won't spoil. Tie her to a tree out there, and let her watch the horses."

"Shall we gag her, Jesse?"

"Well, yes, I guess it would be safer—for if she'd happen to yell out pretty loud, it might put the boobies on their guard."

This conversation was not overheard by Myra, and Jim Cummings, as he went up to her, where she was seated on the rock, her head drooping and herself fearfully depressed in spirits, said, in a quiet tone, with either real or mock politeness:

"Excuse me, my dear young lady, if our ways of doing business out here seem a little rough; but the fact is we've all got to leave you a little while for some sport down the hill; and so, to make sure we'll find you where we leave you, I have to request that you'll allow us to put a handkerchief in your mouth, and fasten you to a tree out yonder until our return, which I don't think will be a great while."

"I am in your power, and shall be obliged to submit to whatever indignities you may see proper to offer."

"Oh, well, my dear, you must recollect I don't do this to insult you, because you see I've taken a great fancy to you; and, in fact, to tell the truth, I'm dead in love with you, and——"

"Stop!" she said. "If you don't want to insult me, don't use such language to me. Bind me, gag me, beat me, murder me——"

"Hello! So you're a spunky little devil, with all your sweet, yielding manner. Very well, then, we'll work on that tack, and I'll not waste soft words where they'll not be of any use. The truth of the whole thing in a nutshell, is, that you've got lots of tin—or, at least, your father had before he was burned up—and——"

"Gracious Heaven!" she exclaimed, with a wild start. "What do you mean by that? Burned up, you say? Have you then murdered my dear father?"

"Well, we burned the house, and I guess the old man went with it."

"Monster!" she cried; "the curse of God be on you all for this devilish work."

"Oh, yes, Miss Weldon, that's all very well. That's the kind of talk we boys are used to. We've heard that a good many times before. But it don't amount to shucks. We get along just as well as those that aren't cursed. And if you want a cursed husband, that's your own business. See?"

"Yes," cried Myra, almost in a frenzy, "and I'd die a thousand deaths sooner than marry you."

"All right now, and we'll settle that business later. I thought from your looks I'd like to have you for a wife, but as long as you've got such a sharp, snap-dragon tongue, I don't mind it much, and so

that you fork over a good smart fortune for us that will do quite as well."

"Come, Jim, we are all waiting," called out Jesse James; "hurry up."

"All right. I'll be there in a jiffy. Come on, missy."

He now hurried his fair captive to a tree, and having gagged her with a handkerchief, using no more force than was necessary for his purpose, and having so securely bound her to a sapling that she could not possibly release herself, he reported that he was ready for business.

Then the whole party, with Jesse James in the lead, stole off down the rough hill, in a different direction from which they had come, and in a manner to take their pursuers by murderous surprise.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE ATTACK AND RESULT.

After the departure of Abner Bliss, the party he left behind tried to make themselves comfortable.

Several of them lighted their pipes, and all waited in a kind of uneasy suspense to hear the report of the old scout.

The most anxious one of the number was Arthur Braceland.

In fact, he thought and felt too much to join in any idle conversation, and, being very restless, he gradually strolled off by himself.

To him this terrible affair was a matter of more than life and death, for it involved the being that he loved, and for whose rescue and restoration to her friends he would not have hesitated a moment to sacrifice his life.

Meantime, with thoughts of rescue uppermost in his mind, he continued to stroll on, forgetful of his surroundings till something like a quarter of a mile divided him from his men.

They, in the meanwhile, nervously uneasy, began to converse and speculate on the chances of overhauling the robber band, and rescuing Squire Weldon's daughter, the pride of the village.

"Tell yous what it air, fellers," said one, "onless we ketch them er devils onawares, we'll hev a purty rough time on't."

"I don't like it," replied one of the weakest; "but I knows as how we can't be men and hev our young leddy took away without doing so'thing to save her."

"Abner Bliss knows a thing or two," said a third; "he's had er good deal scouting exper'ence, and I feels safer with him an I would with a cl'ar greeny."

"What we wants," observed the first speaker, "ar to ketch them short when they ain't looking for't, and guv 'em blazes on the fust round. Ef them Jameses is along, and I s'ects they er, I tell yer we'll hev to be quick and sartin with our fust fire, or

they'll be in our ha'r afore we kin say Jack Robinson."

They were still speculating, when suddenly the whole party was startled with a series of the most infernal yells; and the seven bandits, Jesse James in the lead, came dashing in among them, revolvers in hand, pouring in a murderous fire, and shooting right and left.

There was no battle—only a slaughter, a massacre—for the frightened men had not time to draw their weapons and make any defense before they were shot down like so many sheep in a pen.

Only some three or four, who were the farthest away from the place of assault, and nearest the plain, had any chance to escape, which they lost no time in doing, with the yells of their demoniac assailants sounding in their ears.

Horrible as it is to relate, seven men were shot down in as many seconds, several of them killed outright, while those who were only wounded at the first fire were soon dispatched without mercy.

It was a horrible scene, bloody and ghastly, and only fit for devils to gloat over.

And the devils were there to gloat over it, Jesse James and his six followers, not one of whom had received so much as a scratch.

"Bully for us!" shouted Jesse James, which was answered in chorus by his followers.

"We're the boys to nip them."

"You bet we are."

"But some of the whelps have got away," said Jesse, "and in time they'll rouse up the whole country about us. Come now, tumble these clay lumps over, and take all they've got that is worth having—all their firearms and ammunition, and a pick of their horses, and then we'll bring our own down and be off."

While this plundering was going on, and Jesse James was leaning against a tree, his mask now removed, his hat in his hand, wiping the perspiration from his broad, hard, bearded face, he was never nearer death's door than then.

A deadly rifle was sighted upon his heart, and a finger was almost in the act of pressing the trigger, when a sudden thought, a new idea, came into the mind of him who held the weapon, and he silently drew back, stole off through the bushes, and glided rapidly away.

This daring, unseen fox was no other than Arthur Braceland.

He had been roused from his painful reverie by hearing the fierce yells and rapid shots of the bandits, the screams of terror of his own assailed party, and had hurried back to join in the fight.

On the way he had caught a glimpse of three or four men who had escaped, and had called to them to halt.

They had given no heed to his order, however,

being most terribly frightened and fleeing for their lives.

During the wild noise, excitement and confusion, he had drawn near enough to get a sight of the horrid scene, without having been heard, seen, or his presence even suspected.

"I'll end the career of the cursed leader of these outlaws," had been his thought, as he cautiously thrust forward his rifle and drew a bead on the heart of Jesse James.

His second thought had come just in time to save the lives of both; for if he had then and there shot the human monster his own life would surely have been the penalty.

His second thought had been that while the bandits were all gathered here, Myra must necessarily be left alone; and if he could only manage to get to her in advance of them, he might be able to save her.

So he had drawn off in the manner we have stated, uncocked his piece, and, keeping under cover of the bushes, had glided swiftly around to the point where the bandits had first entered upon the wild, perilous hills.

Though not a professional trailer, he was a good hunter, and had had considerable experience in roaming the woods, and therefore it was not difficult for him to find the tracks and narrow path where the horses had made their ascent.

Pressing onward and upward, as if for his life, he was not long in reaching the crowning rock where the bandits had made their halt.

Here was evidence of their late presence, but no sign of Myra Weldon.

Then his heart bounded at the thought that Abner Bliss might have been here before him, and taken her away during the absence of her captors.

Darting farther back, he caught sight of three or four horses running loose, with a short piece of rope dangling from the neck of each, as if it had been cut from a longer rope.

Then a little search showed him some short pieces of rope at the foot of a small tree, as if cut from some person lately bound to it; and there, too, was a knotted handkerchief, which looked as if it might have been used as a gag.

"By my soul," he said to himself, with quivering emotion, "I do believe the old reliable has found Myra, and taken her away. Yes, here are footprints that lead away in another direction."

He followed these till they were lost in the tracks of trampling horses.

"As I live, they mounted horses here and have escaped."

He looked hurriedly around, and saw some bridles in a heap.

He seized one and mounted the nearest beast; and just at that moment there rung out a blasphemous

oath, he felt something graze the top of his head, and heard the sharp crack of a revolver.

The horse at once bounded away, Arthur darted to the nearest covert, and, with a wild yell, the bandit sprang after him in fierce pursuit.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

Never was there a more astonished, enraged and disgusted set of human beings than Jesse James and his murderous gang when they came upon the scene where they expected to enjoy their triumph, and found their camp fairly raided in their absence.

"That's what we've got for not leaving a guard here," grumbled Jim Cummings. "The girl and a whole fortune gone at a single dash."

"Where's Tom Collins?" demanded Jesse James, as he looked around upon his gathered followers.

"He's the one that shot off the revolver," answered one of the men, "and he's gone off down the hill in chase of somebody or something."

"One of the raiders, do you think?"

"I reckon so."

"I hope he'll catch him without killing him, so that we can make him squeal," said Jesse, with an oath, clutching his hands together, as if he already had the foe in his grasp.

At that moment the report of a gun was heard coming up from the direction which Arthur Brace-land and his pursuer had taken.

"There goes somebody, and I hope it isn't Tom," was remarked.

A couple of the party were sent down to see.

"If the thief he pursued isn't dead," ordered Jesse, "bring him up alive."

While these men were away, the rest of the bandits pushed around in quest of their horses, which had not run any great distance, and were easily caught.

The men all met again on the summit about the same time.

The two who had gone after their comrade, brought him back, badly wounded, and in a dying condition, instead of the foe they had hoped to capture.

He had been shot through the body, and it was seen by those who had had experience with gunshot wounds that he could only live a few minutes longer.

They questioned him carefully, to get at all the facts of the case.

But though the man seemed, in a measure, to comprehend what they said, he was too far gone to make his replies of any value to them.

In a few minutes he had breathed his last.

Then, collecting everything of value from his person, the raiding party dug a grave, and buried him in a lonely spot on the mountain, their curses on his

slayer, and their savage oaths of revenge being in lieu of a Christian funeral service.

Then, with the four horses left them, and two more selected from the best of those of their pursuers, they set off down the hill on the trail of their foes, swearing the blackest vengeance against those who had so discomfited them, provided that they could ever overhaul them.

Arthur Braceland had narrowly escaped with his life from the shot of the bandit, and as we know had fled down the hill, taking the pretty clear trail, which the two horses, ridden by Abner Bliss and Myra Weldon had left behind them.

As Arthur had a few rods the start, and was a very fleet runner, he kept so well ahead of his pursuer that the latter did not appear in sight till he had crossed a little open glade near the foot of the hill, whose descent had not proved so difficult and perilous as on the other side, where all the parties had originally ascended.

He had just crossed the little glade, and had entered a thicket on the other side, when his foe appeared in sight, and he saw he was only pursued by one man.

"You will have it, then, you devil," muttered Arthur, as he came to a halt, with only his revolver in hand, his Winchester having been left in the robbers' camp.

He waited till his man was near enough to make his aim certain and then fired.

And, without going back to him, he turned and fled.

On reaching the foot of the hill in this direction, he again saw a plain before him.

This was open to the left for many a mile, but enclosed some little distance to the right by a horseshoe bend of the ridge, which came around on the other side at a distance of nearly half-a-mile.

Arthur fancied there would be much danger in crossing the plain at this point, because if the rest of the outlaws were in pursuit, they would be likely to see him; and though they might not be able to overtake him on foot, they would be likely to send some fatal bullets in his direction from their far-shooting rifles.

He therefore hesitated, but only for a moment, for the tracks of the horses were clearly seen before him; and he feared, if he turned off in another direction, he might have great difficulty in again finding the trail.

"Life or death!" he muttered, and continued his way.

As he ran on he thought that every breath might be his last, and that at any moment he might feel the ping of a bullet, or, at least, hear the crack of a rifle.

But on, on he went, and every leap drew him nearer to the opposite hill, and made his heart bound with the hope of ultimate escape.

At last he plunged into some concealing bushes, and for a few moments dropped down, with a sense of exhaustion and the exhilarating thought of escape, the two combined making him tremble like an aspen.

He looked back and saw he was not followed.

He did not stop long to indulge in reflections, but now looked forward with hope to what might yet be.

It was clear to his mind that Abner Bliss and Myra Weldon had so far escaped.

He had no doubt of this.

"Up now and after them," he mentally said, as he started to his feet.

The trail led directly into the wood, and up the acclivity, showing that the scout had preferred trusting himself and his fair charge to the cover of the wood, rather than to the risking of their lives on the open plain.

But one thing made Arthur a little uneasy; they were going away from home instead of toward it; and he had some momentary misgivings as he thought that possibly Abner might not prove as true as he had hoped.

He strove to dismiss them, however, and pretty well succeeded in doing so.

On and over the hill he went, which was far less rocky and perilous than the other.

The trail led down into a valley, through which ran a mountain stream that was not deep, but which flowed on over a stony bed.

He went directly across the stream, expecting to see it come out on the other side, but did not find it there.

"What does this mean?" he questioned himself, looking sharply all around him.

If he had been an early pioneer, and well up in the ways of Indians and their white hunters, he would have been at no loss for an answer, for nothing is more effective than water for breaking a trail, and nothing is more certain than that a savage, or experienced Indian scout would use it for that purpose, if he thought himself pursued.

Arthur, though not experienced in this manner, did not lose any time in inaction, but began at once his search up and down the bank of the stream, going a little farther each way each time, but still finding no further trace of those of whom he was in search.

He seemed to have lost his way.

CHAPTER LXIV.

FROM ONE PERIL TO ANOTHER.

In the meantime Abner Bliss was left on the trail of the outlaws.

With a broad trail before him, it required little skill to follow the villains up the acclivity; but he had to move with great caution, for fear they might have one or more spies on the watch.

So, keeping their course, and stealing along outside of it as much as possible, he finally reached the summit, soon after they had descended to make an attack on their pursuers.

As he did not know where they had gone, nor for what purpose, and being fearful of an ambuscade, he fairly crawled around the place, keeping a sharp eye on every tree, bush and quivering leaf.

In this way he had just come in sight of the feeding horses, and Myra Weldon, gagged and bound to a tree, when a loud yelling and firing of the bandits startled him, and proclaimed their position and devilish work.

"That's yer game, hey?" he muttered. "I's afeard o' so'thing like that! Poor fellers! I'm afeard thar won't be many on 'em left to tell how it hap'd. I'm right down sorry about about young Braceland, for he wer a good feller; and, o' course, he'll go under. They must hev seed us a coming. I wish I'd er knowed that, and that they was a going to turn back on us. I'd a staid thar and had things fixed to hev wiped 'em all out. But it can't be helped now, and thar's no use o' crying over spilt milk. The gal's yere, left all alone, and I'll git her off ef I kin, or make a good die."

Then he boldly hurried up to poor Myra, and said:

"I reckon you knows me, Miss Weldon, hey? and won't be sorry to know that I comes yere as yer friend in need?"

As he spoke, he rapidly cut the cords that bound her delicate limbs to the tree, and quickly removed the gag from her mouth.

She looked up at him, trembled, and burst into tears.

"Oh, you are from our village, are you not?" she questioned.

"Yes, miss, and my name's Abner Bliss. I know you, and yer father, and——"

"Oh, my father, my father!" she cried, interrupting him. "They tell me he has already been murdered, burned to death."

"Who telled yer so?"

"The beast that carried me off and brought me here."

"The cussed willi'ns burned your house down; but yer father wer saved—Arthur Braceland saved him."

"Oh, God be thanked! Are you sure?"

"Sartin on't, for I helped to do it myself."

"And Arthur Braceland, what of him?"

"Thar it er, Miss Weldon, and I don't like the looks of it. I'm afeared it's a bad go."

"How?—what?—speak! That firing? those yells? Is Arthur near? Has he followed us? Is he in danger? Is he having a fight with these terrible men?"

"I'm afeard it's so'thing like that, but I can't tell ye now. Yer mustn't wait yere to hear the story. We must up and git while we've got a chance. I'll bridle a couple o' these er hosses, and then we'll be off afore them infarnal skunks gits back."

They were soon mounted and off, Abner cutting the ropes of the other horses, as has previously been mentioned.

We know the route he took, and therefore need not at first follow him in detail.

On the way, though they were riding for their lives, he managed to give Myra Weldon a general account of everything that had happened, so far as he knew.

His fears about the fate of Arthur and his little command filled her with great distress; but she bore up with that noble heroism which the most refined and gentle beings sometimes display.

When they reached the stream, as we have shown, and rode up a considerable distance, in order to break the trail, as he explained to her, she for the first time observed:

"Are we not going in a wrong direction to reach home, Mr. Bliss?"

"Thar! don't mister me, please! Jest call it Abner or Old Ab—as the boys used to do up on the mounti'ns. Yes, mom, to answer yer question squarl'y, we're jest a going in er contrary direction to Mineville; but I reckoned it better to take this 'ere way at fust, fer fear them scamps, ef they don't try to trail us, mought be on ther lookout. And even ef not nigh enough to overhaul us, they mought guv us some shots at long range, and some bullets now is good for a mile or two."

"But will you not take me back home to-day, my friend?"

"Wall, I'll try to graderly work around, so's to fetch yer in arter dark sets in. Yer see, ef they fol-lers us, they can't overtake us, for we've got a big start on 'em, and two o' thar best hosses, and arter dark they'll lose us sartin."

So Abner Bliss and his fair charge rode on for hours, over hill and dale, crossing two or three little streams at each of which he broke the trail in the same manner as before, gradually working around from westerly to an easterly direction.

The sun was pretty well down in the west when they came in sight of a respectable-looking farmhouse.

The horses by this time, having been ridden very fast over rough ground, began to show unmistakable signs of fatigue, and Myra Weldon herself, having had nothing to eat during the long and eventful day,

and having suffered so much from mental anxiety and exhausting emotions as to seriously weaken her vital powers, especially considering the enervating effects of the chloroform and her previous loss of healthful sleep, now found herself in a condition which rendered her scarcely able to sit her horse.

This farmhouse, too, looked very peaceful and inviting, and therefore when Abner, seeing her condition, suggested that some rest and refreshments here might be of great benefit to herself and the animals, she readily consented to make the call.

But just here an accident happened which would have made the halt imperative, even if there had been no inclination that way.

As the two were descending a steep bank into a road, or lane, that ran up past the house, the horse ridden by Myra made a sudden spring, stumbled and fell, throwing her over his head, upon some rough ground, with a force that completely stunned her.

In a moment the scout was at her side.

"Poor little gal!" he muttered, as he bent down and raised her head, and saw it was cut and bleeding; "this yere's too bad, jest as yer was gitting nicely away from them er cutthroats."

The horse that had stumbled was floundering and groaning, and a glance at the beast showed Abner that he had broken his leg and would have to be killed, thus depriving his wounded rider of his further assistance in her escape, even should she live to need it.

At this juncture two persons came down from the farmhouse.

One was a man about five-and-forty, rather under size, slender and muscular, with black hair and small, black, quizzing eyes, shaded by heavy, beetling brows, a turned-up nose, and a mouth and chin concealed under a long, thick growth of beard, and he had a queer way of looking at a person—partly defiant and sharply inquisitive—while he kept stepping around, as if the ground were hot, and every minute or so kept taking snuff from a box that rarely left his hand.

The second person, his companion, was a girl of eighteen, with a clear-cut, handsome face, deep blue eyes, and the expression of whose regular features was so peculiar as to attract attention, and leave you uncertain whether the owner was to be most loved or feared.

"How d'ye do?" said the man, as he came up, looking sharply and quizzically at the scout, as the latter sat on the ground, holding the head and gently chafing the temples of his still unconscious companion.

"I'd do better ef it warn't for this yere axerdent," growled Abner, in no pleasant humor.

The farmer eyed him sharply.

"Is she killed, or seriously hurt?" asked the girl, in a quiet, even tone of voice, that did not indicate

emotion of any kind, either sympathy or aversion, and yet did not seem to be entirely devoid of interest.

"I don't know, mom," respectfully replied Abner. "I hopes she's only stunned. She breathes. Can't I take her inter yer house and hev so'thing done for her?"

The girl, instead of answering herself, glanced at her father, for such he was.

He kept his black, sharp, cunning eyes on the face of the scout, and then abruptly demanded:

"Well, what about your horses? One of them has got his leg broke, hasn't he?"

"Yes, and he'll hev to be killed."

"And the other one?"

"I wants him to hev a right good feed."

"Shall I shoot the wounded one for ye?"

"Got the irons?"

"No; but I can take one of yours."

Abner looked and measured the little man with his eye, and then handed him one of his revolvers with the remark:

"Shoot him plumb through the brain, and don't waste no powder."

A few moments later there was a sharp crack, and the wounded horse fell over with a quiver, released from his sufferings.

Then the farmer walked back and handed the revolver to the scout, and began stepping around, back and forth, eying him sharply and taking more snuff.

"That beast was ridden by the young lady, eh?" he said with a quizzing expression.

"Yes—yes."

"And the horse has a man's saddle on it, eh?"

"Yes—yes!" angrily snapped Abner. "I sees yer wants ter know all about it, and I've said I'll tell yer all about it arter this young leddy gits took keer on."

"Well, we'll take her into the house, then, at once."

So the unconscious young lady was carefully borne into the dwelling by the three parties, Abner Bliss little dreaming of the danger that lay in the act.

For that was the residence of Sam Stokes, his wife and daughter, the friends of the freebooters, and the farmhouse previously mentioned by Jesse James as the one to which he proposed to take Myra Weldon for safety and concealment.

CHAPTER LXV.

SUSPICIOUS AT WORK.

Mrs. Stokes was a thin, tall, slender, bony, muscular woman, with a saturnine countenance, hollow cheeks, and sunken, stony-looking eyes.

She was very homely in appearance, as well as her husband, so much so that it would have been a physiological wonder how they could have so hand-

some-looking a daughter, only that we know it seems to be a rule of nature to work by contrasts.

Her manners were cold and stiff, and she had but little to say at any time.

She received the newcomers without a question, and scarcely a nod, in a kind of matter-of-course manner.

Then she at once opened and held the door of an adjoining room, where she silently pointed to a comfortable bed, upon which Myra was carefully laid.

Then she got some camphor, and held it to her nose for a short time, and then carefully bathed her head with another lotion.

In a few minutes the injured young lady showed signs of returning animation, and in less than half-an-hour was able to sit up and converse.

"You won't think of going on to-night?" said Stokes to Bliss.

"I'd like ter, but I'm afeard we can't," replied the scout.

"Well, don't."

"Ef you kin keep us yere all safe, o' course we'll thank ye, and pay yer besides."

"You know you promised to tell me all about yourselves?" returned the little man, stepping around and taking snuff.

"Yes, and I'll do it now," rejoined Abner.

He then proceeded in his own way to give a brief but clear account of all that had happened, as far as he knew, from the time of the first abduction of Myra Weldon, down to the time of his arrival at the farm.

All listened in silent attention to the details of the story.

Then the farmer began to question him about the kidnapers, and if he thought the James boys were a part of the desperadoes, and if he believed they would follow on his trail.

"I don't know for sartin ef they's among the scoundrels," answered Abner; "but the whole thing er jest like thar kind o' work, and I'm mighty afeard they'll foller us, and that they'll come on yere ef it don't git dark soon enough fer them to be onsartin about thier trail."

"If they do come," observed Farmer Stokes, "it will be right bad for all of us."

"Can't yer conceal us somehow, or, at least, Miss Weldon."

"What! with that dead horse out there, that you took from them, bridle and saddle and all, thus exposing us?" queried Farmer Stokes.

"Wall, you kin hide bridle and saddle, hey? and tell them that we both on us went on t'other hoss?"

"What! with them then finding the hoss in the stable?"

"Oh, wall, ef they does come, t'other hoss needn't be thar, for I'll slip out o' the back way, mount him, and scoot off myself."

"And leave Miss Weldon with us, eh?"

"Not unless you'll agree ter hide her and keep her safe till I gits back with some friends."

"All right, then, my man," returned the farmer, "we'll fix things in that way."

At this moment Abner chanced to glance toward the farmer's daughter, when he saw an expression on her face that startled him.

It was a stange, peculiar look, and he was at an utter loss to know what it meant.

She was not looking at him, however, but rather into vacancy, and what he saw seemed to be the effect of thoughts that were passing through her mind.

He glanced at the farmer's wife, and saw that everything there was quiet, stony and cold.

Then a furtive glance at the farmer's face showed him a satisfied twinkle of the little black eyes as a huge pinch of snuff went up to his nose.

All these things taken together were plainer reading to Abner Bliss than if they had been printed in a book.

They meant something—something not pleasant for him to contemplate.

They raised a suspicion that all here was not as calm, and peaceful, and innocent as he had hoped to find it.

"I'll hev to be on my guard," he said to himself, "and I wish the gal was well out o' yere. But I can't git 'er out jest now, 'cause she ain't in no condition to travel. Confound that'er stumbling beast! It a'most looks as ef he stumbled and spilt her yere a purpose to please his bloody masters."

He glanced at Myra, and she gave him back a look of distress that touched his heart.

But he felt that there was nothing to be done to better their condition, except to look closely to his weapons and be constantly on the watch.

By this time the sun had set, and it was already beginning to grow dark.

"Come," said Stokes, "while the women folks get some supper ready for us we'll go out and put up your horse, and regulate things the best way we can do to ward off suspicion."

This proposition suited Abner, for he wanted to get out, take a sharp survey around him, and feel the freedom of the open air.

So the horse, which had been too badly strained to go much further without food and rest, more especially if required to carry a double load, was taken to the stable of a barn in the rear of the house, unsaddled, rubbed down, and given a good feed of hay and grain.

"Three hours will fix him all right for another go," thought Abner; "and ef the cussed hounds will jest hold off that er long, and the poor gal gits strong enough for the wentur, I'll take 'er off, hit or miss, and not wait for no daylight fer the pizen skunks to come up and hem us in."

CHAPTER LXVI.

INTO THE LION'S MOUTH.

It was now gradually growing darker every moment, but was still light enough to see all around for a considerable distance.

This it was easy to do, because the house stood on a slight elevation, from which the ground sloped away on every side.

It was in one direction that Abner looked, with all the sharpness his keen, bright eyes permitted, and that was over the trail which he and Myra had left behind them in their flight.

There was nothing yet on this route that he could see to alarm him, and he breathed freer for the fact, and the knowledge that it would soon be too dark for any one to follow the trail.

"Ef I kin only guv 'em the go by, I'll be a happy old codge," he thought. "Then, ef only poor Arthur Braceland was along—cl'ar, free and unhurt, to jine the young leddy—Old Ab, would feel like dancing on his head."

"Come," said Farmer Stokes, "we've got everything now about as snug as we can fix it, I reckon, and so we'll go in and have some supper."

"I'd like to wait out yere jest a bit longer," replied Abner, "in order to see ef them bloody thieves gits in sight afore dark."

So they waited till the landscape was shut off from their view by darkness, during which time nothing new had been discovered, and then they went into the house.

There a smoking supper of bacon and eggs, potatoes, bread and coffee was set out on a neat, white cloth, and its appetizing smell made the temptation to eat almost irresistible to the hearty and hungry scout.

As the whole party were in the act of taking seats at the table, Mrs. Stokes assisting her weak and somewhat tottering guest by taking hold of her arm, and Farmer Stokes turning aside to draw the curtain at the window, the daughter of these two worthy people passed Abner Bliss so close as to brush against him, and said, in a kind of whisper, so that only he could hear:

"Be on your guard, and get the girl away and yourself, too, as quick as you can."

Then, with a warning glance as he looked at her, she quietly added, as she moved a chair from the table:

"Here, sir, please sit here."

Of course, Abner Bliss felt more uneasy than ever; but he concealed all expression of feeling; and no one, to have looked at him, as he sat there and quietly devoured the welcome repast, would have suspected that he had anything more serious on his mind than the satisfying of his hunger with a good, hearty meal.

Myra Weldon could not eat heartily.

The food was fairly good, but a distressful feeling of uncertainty and dread, if not absolute fear, had deprived her of appetite; besides which the heavy fall had given her a violent shock, and she needed rest to restore her usual condition of health.

Faithful old Abner watched her furtively, as he quietly devoured the food before him, and wondered if he would soon find her in a condition for a sudden removal and a hard night's journey.

"Suthing's up yere," he said to himself, "and it won't never do to go to sleep and take things easy arter what I've suspected, and that gal's warning."

During the meal Sam Stokes became more than usually loquacious in talking about his own affairs, which his guest fancied was to put him at his ease and lull him into a sense of security.

As soon as the meal was over, pipes and tobacco were produced, and then a bottle of whisky with tumblers.

The host poured out a glass and pretended to sip it, telling Abner to help himself and drink heartily.

As Abner took up the bottle and partly filled the tumbler, he managed to get a glance at the face of the girl, who quickly and slyly passed her hand across her mouth, gave him a warning look, and slightly shook her head.

"Pizened!" thought Abner; "and until I sees this yer cuss plump it down hisself, it don't git inter my in'ards—not ef I knows it—nary."

Being near an open window, he watched his chance, while holding his tumbler and talking carelessly, when neither the eye of the host nor hostess was on him, to jerk the contents out to the ground, and then put the glass to his mouth, and smack his lips as if he had just drained it.

He soon saw meaning glances exchanged between husband and wife, who noticed the empty glass, and caught an approving nod from the daughter.

"That er's the stuff to make a feller feel good," he observed, with another loud smack.

"Help yourself freely," returned the gratified farmer. "Take another nip."

"No, thankee, sir, one allers does me when I'm out on biz. Besides, I sees you don't do much at it yourself."

"Well, no," rejoined the host, fidgeting, "I'm not feeling very well to-night."

Abner was not certain as to what was expected to be the result of his potation, but he thought it probable that a kind of drunken stupor might answer the purpose.

So he gradually assumed that appearance, and presently began to droop his head and nod, keeping

a furtive lookout on every person and thing around him.

He saw more meaning glances exchanged between his host and hostess, together with some peculiar nods and signs.

Then he sort of roused up, with a kind of drunken dignity, and said, rather thickly:

"Scu-'scuse me, sir; but—somehow—I—I—feels orful—sleepy. I don't 'zactly know how it er; but I—I—'spects as how ther—ther—ride to-day's made me more tired than I knowed on."

"Take another nip, and then I'll show you a bed, where you can get a good night's rest," said the gratified farmer.

"No, sir—thank'e, sir—I—I've got er-ernuff."

With this the well-acting scout rose clumsily to his feet, seeming quite heavy, and apparently balancing himself with great difficulty.

"Let me show you to your bed," said Stokes, also rising, stepping around in his nervous way, looking keenly into his guest's face, tapping his box, and taking more snuff.

"All—all—right!" returned Abner, thickly, looking over to where poor Myra was sitting in the chair, pale as death, eying him with a distressful alarm; "I—I—wants ter shee her—a—a—minute—all alone—by my—my—shelf," and he pointed at his fair charge with an unsteady motion.

"Better let her rest to-night," said Stokes, "and see her in the morning, when you both will feel better and fresher."

"No—no yer don't," returned Abner, with a drunken man's persistence. "I—I'm er—er—jest a going ter shee her, ter-night, all—all—alone, er die!"

Stokes and his wife now conferred together for a minute or two, and then decided between themselves that it might be better to let the fellow have his way.

"It won't amount to anything, Sam," whispered the woman to her husband, "and he may fall asleep while talking to her, and then we have him all the same."

So he was conducted into another room, staggering as he went.

Then Myra was handed a light, and told to go in and talk to her friend, and persuade him to lie down and get a good rest.

She seemed very much frightened and distressed, but complied with the directions so far as to enter the room and close the door behind her.

The instant this was done, she saw a sudden change that for a moment startled her.

Abner at once straightened himself up, all appearance of intoxication was swept away like a flash, and putting his finger to his lips, as a sign of caution, he said, in a whisper:

"Hush and listen! I'm not drunk. That liquor's pizened. But I didn't drink any. We're in bad hands yere. They've planned ter make an end o' me,

and the Lord knows what they want to do with you. We've got to git away somehow."

He glanced sharply around the room, while she, ghastly pale, trembled in every limb.

He saw another door, and quickly glided to it, slipped the bolts and opened it.

The fresh air came upon his heated face.

Looking out, he saw a cluster of bushes below and bright stars above.

"Thank God for this!" he said. "We kin git away, Miss Weldon, ef you's able to bear the journey and kin go now."

"Oh, yes—yes!" she tremblingly answered; "I can bear it. Anywhere, anywhere, to get away from here. In here, I don't know why, I am frightened nearly to death."

"The why is 'cause thar's death in't fer me, and heaven knows what thar er fer you."

He glided back to the other door as he spoke, and looked for bolts to fasten it, in order to delay entrance, in case any one should attempt to come in.

There were no bolts to this door, no lock that he could fasten, and so he quickly brought up some of the furniture and placed it against it.

Then, seizing Myra's arm, he hurried her out into the open air, and down through a kind of a garden, and out through a gate that opened near the barn-yard.

"Stand yere a minute," he said.

Then, darting into the stable, he quickly had the bridle and saddle on the horse, and the beast led out to where she was waiting.

So far there was no alarm, and he congratulated himself on the cunning by which he hoped to escape without bloodshed.

Lifting Myra up in his strong arms as if she were a child, Abner seated her so that he could mount himself behind her, and support her in the same position she had been borne away from home by her original captor.

Then he quietly walked the horse down to the lane, so as not to make any disturbing noise, started him forward and passed the house.

"Now, then, we's free!" he said, exultingly.

He now set forward in a gentle canter, and just at that moment heard loud voices at the dwelling, which showed that their flight had been discovered.

"Good-by, old snuff," he grinned, "and drink the rest of yer fiery liquor yerself."

At that moment his keen ear caught the sounds of tramping hoofs in front of him, which warned him that a body of horsemen was approaching.

Sinking his spurs into the flanks of his horse, he dashed into the bushes at one side of the road. Then, as quickly, he reined up his horse, and slipping from its back grasped his horse's nostrils to prevent him from whinneying as the cavalcade swept by.

The cavalcade passed within easy shot of where h

stood watching everything with his hawklike eyes, but he had no idea of shooting.

They went on and entered the house, and he smiled to himself as he fancied what would be the effect when his disappearance was discovered.

He was just about to mount and start off again when his attention was attracted to a dark figure that he saw riding along as if dogging the steps of the ruffians.

"Hello!" he mentally said; "who in thunder er this yere, and what's ther meaning on't?"

At first he did not dream of attracting the notice of the newcomer.

Then, as he watched his cautious, skulking motions, it suddenly occurred to him that the man might be a spy like him himself; and, if so, it would be better that they should work together than separately.

So he roused up a little, and breathed out a low, whistling sound.

Instantly the figure slid from his saddle and dropped to the earth, and Abner felt more than ever certain that he was another spy.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, in a low, guarded tone. "Ef you's arter them rascals, I'm with yer, body and soul."

"Who speaks?" came back in the same guarded tone.

"A man that hates hellyuns."

"Your name?"

"Abner Bliss."

"What, is it you, my dear friend?"

Then there was a sudden bounding forward of a human figure toward the old scout, and the next moment Arthur Braceland and Abner Bliss clasped each other's hand.

It took but a moment for the scout to tell Braceland of his rescue of Myra, and in an instant Braceland was at the side of his sweetheart.

CHAPTER LXVII.

STILL FOOTFALLS OF FATE.

For some minutes not a word was spoken, the lovers standing together, clasped in each other's arms, and their joy being too deep for anything but the inner emotions of the soul.

The scout watched them with a feeling of intense gratification at first; but at length, in view of all the surrounding dangers, he began to grow restive.

"Come," he said, "this yere kind of business can wait, but jest yere we's got to look out sharp to keep our heads on our bodies."

"You're right," cried Arthur. "Lead the way from here, and let us now escape, if we can."

So the little party now set off, under guidance of Abner Bliss, and sought the nearest wood, where

they certainly could not be discovered by any searching party during the hours of darkness.

Myra Weldon, after all she had gone through, felt very weak, and could not remain in the saddle, and when a safe place was found, they stopped there for rest, to talk over the whole affair and to decide upon the course which might be best for them to pursue next.

But what was next to be done?

They were in a wilderness, many a long mile from Mineville, and in a region so sparsely settled, at the best, that in nearly every case there was from one to three miles between dwellings.

"Ef I hain't made no mistake in the lay of the land," observed Abner, "thar's another small willage about five miles from yere, over toward the south."

"Will that not be going directly from home?" queried Arthur.

"Yes, right squar'. But what better kin we do? Miss Weldon ain't able to travel back t'other way on horseback. Thar's a stage that runs down to Plainfield, about twenty miles eastward, and from thar again we could git another back to Mineville."

"A long way round, and we'd hardly get home under two or three days."

"And ef it took us two or three weeks, it's better'n gitting captur'd ag'in, or heving Miss Weldon tired out and took sick on the way—ain't it?"

"Yes, of course—anything is better than that. Well, then, we will go that way under your guidance."

This being settled, and as they considered themselves pretty safe where they were, they decided to remain there till daylight and get what rest they could.

The nights were warm, though somewhat damp with dew, and therefore they would not suffer from cold, even without a fire.

With their knives the two men cut some bushes, and made a somewhat easy pallet for Myra to rest on; and as they had no blanket, Arthur took the further precaution to cover her with his coat.

Then the two men staked their horses and stretched themselves out near her, and in this manner all three took a much-needed sleep.

At the first streak of light in the east, the hardy scout roused up, feeling much refreshed; and as there was nothing with which to prepare a morning meal, the little party was soon again on the move.

The first high hill they ascended they took a careful survey of the surrounding country, but saw nothing in any direction to give them fresh alarm.

Here and there, in various quarters, little thin columns of smoke could be seen, which showed the localities of settlers, most of them the tenants of log dwellings.

Myra Weldon, of a fine organization and delicate nurture, was little calculated for a tedious ride

through a rough wilderness; and though she was much stronger for the rest she had had in body, with comparative ease of mind, and the cheering support of the man she loved, she yet found the journey before her a hard task indeed.

But they finally came in sight of a log dwelling, where it was thought it might be safe to stop, and, if possible, procure a substantial breakfast.

The only occupant of the hut was a woman and two children, but after dickering with the scout, she agreed to give them a breakfast.

She then turned back into her poorly-furnished dwelling, gave her visitors some rude benches for seats, and proceeded, with considerable alacrity, to get the meal required; which consisted of corn bread, potatoes, fried salt pork, and rather indifferent coffee. In the meantime the children fed the horses. It was, at least, an hour before this meal was prepared and eaten; and then Arthur handed her a silver dollar, which seemed to put them in a very good humor.

"Now," said Arthur, "show us the way to Sinktown, and tell us how far it is."

She went out and showed them the direction, and also a kind of horsepath, which she said would lead them down to the village, the distance to which was yet some three or four miles.

They bade her good-day and resumed their journey; and in due time they reached the village of Sinktown without any further adventure.

There was a pretty good road through this village, over which the stage passed from larger places, east and west, carrying passengers and mail.

There was also an inn where stagecoaches stopped on their way to and fro, and thither our party went to secure seats in the next stage going eastward.

Much to their disappointment and discomfort, they learned that the coach they wanted would not pass through the place until near nightfall, and so they had nothing better to do than wait for it.

It came at last, near sundown, and contained six passengers, four men and two women.

The little party boarded the coach. Then away it dashed through the village, drawn by its four spirited horses.

Arthur and Myra now felt more at their ease, believing that all dangers were passed, and that they were now safely on their homeward route.

And yet, in the turn of the wheel of fate, they were really in greater peril than they had been at any time since the fair maiden's escape from the clutches of the robber fiends.

On, on, went the mail coach, the spirited horses stepping off quickly and proudly under the inspiring crack of the driver's whip.

Night soon came down darkly, with a veil of clouds drawn between the glimmering stars and the earth.

Suddenly, while whirling through a belt of wood,

in a little dingle, all the passengers were startled by a clear, cold, commanding voice, calling out the single word:

"Halt!"

Then, as if the heads of the leading horses had been suddenly seized, the coach stopped at once, the door was jerked open, a bright light was flashed in upon the frightened passengers from a dark lantern, a couple of revolvers were thrust forward, so that the light gleamed from their bright barrels, and the same cold, commanding voice, with a blasphemous oath, said:

"Throw up your hands, every one of you, and come out here at once, or we'll blow out your—brains!"

Though tempted to resist, both Abner and Arthur had the good sense to perceive that resistance under the circumstances would be almost certain death.

So they, too, complied with the order, and came out with the others, thinking the affair meant personal robbery and nothing worse.

By here and there a glimmer of the lights, it was seen that the robber band numbered several individuals, all of whom wore masks, through which gleamed sharp, determined eyes.

The whole party of passengers was quickly arranged in a line; and then, while being covered with deadly weapons, they were silently searched by one man, who took from them everything of value—money, jewelry and weapons.

This matter occupied but a very brief time, and then, strangely enough, Abner, Arthur and Myra were stood aside, while the others were ordered into the stage, and the driver told to throw off the mail bags.

"Got any boxes up there?" was next questioned.

"Only one," replied the driver.

"What's in that?"

"I don't know."

"Don't lie now, you cuss."

"I don't know, I tell you."

"Is it heavy?"

"Rayther."

"Specie or gold dust, then, it's like. Anyhow, tumble it off, and be quick about it."

The box soon came down with a heavy thud.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

The robber, as if not fully satisfied, sprang up and looked.

"All right," he said, as he jumped down. "Now drive on, as if the devil was after you, and don't look back."

This the man did, and coach and horses were quickly out of sight and hearing.

What did this singling out and detaining of our three friends mean?

There came over each a fearful suspicion, which caused each heart to sink with dreadful apprehension.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE OUTLAWS AND THEIR PRISONERS.

The stage had been held up by Jesse James and his crew.

And this, not because he had expected to find his late fair prisoner and her friends among the passengers, but simply for the purpose of ordinary robbery.

He, of course, knew Myra; and Jim Cummings had had good reason to remember the lover, who had captured him in his first abduction of Myra and also the rough borderman, whose voice had been loud in his condemnation at his snap trial in Mineville, and so they had been detained.

The outlaws had left the house of Farmer Stokes immediately on hearing of the escape of Myra.

At that time the robbery of the stage, between Sinktown and Plainfield, had not been thought of by them.

The rifling of the mail produced a few hundred dollars in cash; but the heavy little box, when broken open, excited a good deal of profanity.

On examination they supposed it to contain nothing but bars of lead, and it was soon pitched aside as worthless.

This was a mistake, however, as the cunning trader who owned it, and who was himself one of the passengers in the coach had placed inside of each chunk of lead a large ingot of gold, by first melting the lead and dipping into it more valuable metal.

This box thus thrown away as valueless was, in fact, no mean fortune in itself.

Having made a fair distribution of their collection of money and other valuables, the robbers now gave their attention to the prisoners.

They were all three placed in the center of an open space, with the bandits completely surrounding them, all their masks now removed.

No mercy had the two male prisoners any reason to expect from such bloodthirsty captors, and this they knew.

They believed that death, though it might be delayed, as the cat sometimes plays with its prey, would surely come in the end.

Jesse James deliberately surveyed Abner and Arthur, while his followers watched his countenance with intense interest.

"Well, young man," he said, with a sardonic smile, addressing Arthur Braceland, "as the—judges of your—courts observe, have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon you?"

Before Arthur could speak Myra Weldon threw herself at the feet of this terrible bandit chief, exclaiming:

"For God's sake, spare him, spare him!"

"Take her away," said Jesse James, coldly.

Jim Cummings and Jake Blossom sprang forward and seized her, one on each side, lifting her to her feet.

"Oh, my God!" she cried, struggling to free herself, "if he is to be murdered, let me die, too—let the same weapon kill us both."

The center parties stood in a bright light, for the rays of three or four dark lanterns were turned full upon them, so that the expression of each face there could be clearly perceived.

Arthur, deadly pale, stood with compressed lips, as one prepared to meet his doom like a brave man and not a coward.

Abner Bliss had a dark frown on his brow, and his small, black eyes gleamed sullenly, but not a single muscle of his strongly-marked, angular face quivered.

Jesse turned his cold, stern eye from them to Myra; and as his gaze rested upon her ghastly, anguished countenance, with its marked expression of noble self-sacrifice, there was a momentary gleam of secret admiration.

He was a man, who, with all his cruel crimes, could appreciate that courage which comes from the soul, and who utterly hated and despised the miserable cowardice of a craven, groveling spirit.

But he finally said:

"Though she is properly your prisoner, Jim, it is my request not only that you do her no harm, but also that you use her well."

Jesse turned again to his two prisoners.

"Well," he said, "now for your answer," again addressing Arthur Braceland. "Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced upon you?"

"I would have much to say," firmly replied Arthur, "if I knew I could speak to one that would listen to reason."

"Say on, anyhow. What the deuce do you know about who will listen to reason?"

"Then I would say, Jesse James——"

"So you know me, then?" interrupted the other.

Before Arthur could make a reply a stern, commanding voice rang out with startling effect:

"Throw up your hands and surrender, or you are all dead men."

CHAPTER LXIX.

GONE BEYOND PURSUIT.

Jesse James and his followers, though many or few, were mostly desperadoes like himself, who carried their lives in their hands, and were always ready to meet danger in any shape.

They were now taken by surprise on looking around and seeing the glittering barrels of muskets in the hands of uniformed soldiers.

But their surprise was only the instant prelude to action, for the thought of surrender never for a moment entered into their consideration. Drawing their revolvers from their belts, one in each hand, they sprang toward their foes and opened a deadly fire.

The soldiers, startled at so unexpected an assault, fell a little back; and then, at the word of command, poured forth a volley.

"To horse!" shouted Jesse James, as he shot down two or three of the nearest soldiers, and then bounded away to where the animals were fastened.

In less time than it takes us to tell of it, every bandit was at his horse, for not one of them was disabled, and the next moment they were dashing away with yells of defiance.

Arthur and Abner had thus been freed from their foes.

Myra Weldon had not been so fortunate, and was again carried off by the fleeing outlaws.

As the bandits were all mounted, and the soldiers on foot, no attempt was made to follow them.

In fact, though they should have had the best of the fight, they really had the worst of it.

Two men had been killed outright, and three or four wounded.

The lieutenant in command was very much chagrined at his failure in capturing the little band of outlaws.

But why Government soldiers there? And how did they get there?

When the stage was ordered on, as has previously been stated, it carried among the passengers one Asa Perkins, the owner of the treasure-box which the robbers had cast aside as worthless.

He had anticipated some such action on their part, when they should come to find it apparently only contained lead instead of more precious metal; and though for a mile or two he rode quietly on with the rest, it was his intention to go back as soon as he could do so safely, in the hope of recovering his treasure.

On looking from a stage window, he had espied, a little way off from the main road, the camp of a company of Government soldiers, who were on their route to one of the Western forts.

Fortunately neither Arthur Braceland nor Abner Bliss had been wounded in the brief skirmish which had taken place.

In fact, the instant the firing had begun, knowing that with their hands bound behind them they could take no part in the fight, they had dropped to the ground.

As soon as all was over they were freed from their bonds; and then Arthur, wild at the loss of Myra Weldon, was for setting off at once in pursuit of her captors.

"Say, cap, don't be onreasonable," chided the more cool-headed mountaineer.

"But Myra Weldon, man, is in the hands of these cursed scoundrels, and she's got to be rescued," cried Arthur, excitedly.

"But they's gone off on hosses, and we hain't got nary one?"

After some further talk and consideration, Arthur reluctantly came to the conclusion that he must yield to the good advice of the others.

It was a gloomy return for the officer in command.

All search for the outlaws had for a time to be given up. Arthur and Abner set off gloomily for home, there to await some news of the whereabouts of the villains whom they believed would soon communicate with them regarding a ransom for Myra.

When day broke on the morning following the eventful stage robbery and almost miraculous escape of the freebooters, Jesse James was conducting his little band up the rocky defile of a mountain, fifty miles to the northward of the scene of his last daring exploit.

It had been a long, hard nights' ride for Myra Weldon, and what with fatigue and grief she was nearly dead.

She understood she was to be offered for ransom, and knew her loving father would redeem his daughter at any cost, and therefore that her life was not in immediate danger; but she also believed, and no one cared to undeceive her, that her lover had been slain at the time she heard the shouting and firing, and life no longer had any charms for her.

The mountain they were ascending was in a thinly-settled region; and the few people living in that vicinity, if not actually freebooters themselves, were persons supposed to wink at the crimes of their neighbors.

Upon this mountain there was a cave of rather large dimensions, which had been fitted up with considerable care, even luxury, and which was really a rendezvous for not only the few men we have seen, but for a good many others who acknowledged Jesse James as their captain and controlling spirit.

The entrance to the cave was near the summit, from a flat table rock about one hundred feet square, with another rock rising perpendicularly above it, the whole crest being one tremendous rock, having a sheer precipice of from one hundred to two hundred feet on every side, with the one exception of the sloping ravine or gulch already mentioned.

Finally they reached a sort of table rock and beyond was the dark-looking mouth of a cave.

Without hesitation, they entered.

A negro woman named Sally was lighting the lamps as they entered, and she looked to see the effect upon the newcomer of these gorgeous surroundings.

Myra was evidently surprised; but she was suffering too much, physically and mentally, to give this grand apartment in the heart of a mountain anything more than a passing glance and thought.

She staggered forward, threw herself down on a sofa, and gave way to heartbreaking sobs.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE BLACK SHADOW OF DEATH.

Sally was kept busy for more than an hour in preparing breakfast for the men.

Then, while they were eating, she made a selection of such edibles as she thought her charge might fancy, and, with a cup of fine cocoa, took them into Myra.

But, to her surprise, she found Myra rolling on the

loor, with a raging fever, her face now red, and her eyes glaring like those of a maniac.

As her fever progressed, she raved in the wildest manner, and her strength so increased as to require three or four men to hold her.

The bandits were much alarmed, fearing she would lie on their hands, or become hopelessly insane.

When Jesse James was called, he decided that a physician should see her as soon as possible.

There was only one, however, within a radius of five miles, that they could trust with their secrets; he was a sworn member of their gang, and, though not openly acting with them, was ready to aid them at any time and in any manner.

One of the men was instantly dispatched for Dr. Bradshaw, and in a couple of hours returned with him.

"Well, doctor?" queried Jesse, after the patient had been seen.

"Bad case, Captain James, a very bad case, indeed."

"Can you save her?"

"It is very doubtful. I will do my best. She must be bled at once. Let her be held as still as possible, while I bandage her arm and open a vein."

The blood from one arm not being sufficient to materially weaken her delirious strength, a vein in the other arm was opened, and thus excited nature's vitality was drawn away from the unconscious patient.

Gradually she grew weaker and thus calmer, till the doctor himself decided that no more blood could be taken from her without an almost certain loss of life.

"What do you think of the case now, doctor?" asked Jesse James, as he conducted him from the cave.

"I am afraid there is very little hope of her recovery."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"I am certain," pursued the medical man, "that she can never recover without the best of nursing and care, or more will depend upon those than upon any drugs I can give her."

"You know my wife?" asked Jesse.

"Yes."

"How would she do for a nurse?"

"Just the thing, she is a woman of nerve and experience."

"And tender-hearted, too, doctor, in any matter in which I am concerned."

As soon as the doctor had departed Jesse James dispatched a messenger for his wife, with strict injunctions that there should be no delay in either going or coming.

He then himself returned to the suffering patient, who had quieted down, though she was still unconscious.

And here the bold, daring outlaw, though a man seeking with bloody deeds, himself took charge of the poor sufferer, and for the time became one of the most kind, gentle and patient of watchers by what might soon prove to be the bed of death.

In the course of the night Mrs. James herself was brought upon the scene.

She was a tall, fine, rather handsome, dark-eyed woman, who evidently loved her husband, in her way, quite passionately and devotedly.

After a clear explanation of the whole matter, she took her place by the sick-bed, declaring that if woman's

care and skill could save the patient, she should be saved.

The doctor's prescriptions did not break the fever, and Myra Weldon became worse and worse.

She went down, down, until she feebly knocked at the door of death.

One day the doctor stood beside her bed, expecting every moment to be her last.

Jesse James, his wife, and others were present.

The hardened, blood-stained outlaw, and she who had vowed to share his fortunes for weal or woe, stood by the poor, unconscious patient, quite sad and depressed in spirits.

The bandit chieftain and his wife, in their many vigils by her side, had become as attached to the young lady as if she had been of their own flesh and blood.

At last the end came.

The pulse ceased beating, the breath stopped, and the heart became still.

"All is over," said the doctor. "She is dead."

CHAPTER LXXI.

A MOTHER OF BANDITS.

One clear, warm day, in the month of September, two dusty travelers were trudging along a country road in one of the western line of counties of the State of Missouri.

Their beards were long, and their faces and hands not overly clean, as if soap and water were seldom applied.

Ascending a slight elevation, they came in sight of a peaceful-looking farmhouse.

Here they made a halt, and quietly but keenly scanned the surrounding scenes.

"Well, Abner," observed the younger of the two, "if we've been properly directed, I suppose yonder dwelling is the abode of Mrs. Samuels, the mother of the James boys, one of whom we have been so vainly seeking for the last few weeks. I hope so, at all events, and that we may soon be able to get some information concerning her Jesse, who seems to be everywhere except where we are looking for him."

Then the two men went boldly down to the dwelling before them and knocked at the door.

It was quickly opened by a tall, one-armed, angular, muscular woman, with gray hair—sharp, searching, but cold, wicked-looking eyes—a big, grim mouth, with tightly-compressed lips, beetling brows, a hairy upper lip, a prominent nose, and altogether a harsh, repulsive-looking countenance.

Her sharp eye instantly took in the two men, as if she were ready to devour them; and with a scowl she demanded in a husky tone:

"Well, who are you? and what do you want?"

"Is this Mrs. Dr. Samuels?" inquired Arthur, in a bland, polite tone.

"It is," was the answer, and the huge lower jaw came up with a snap.

It took Braceland a long time to convince Mrs. Samuels of the truth of his story, but at length when he and Abner left her house they were armed with a written pass that would protect them from any of Jesse James' followers.

And they also had full directions for finding Jesse James' mountain retreat.

After a weary tramp of days, during which they mostly camped out at night, and lived on food they carried with them, with now and then a meal at some lonely log dwelling, our two friends finally entered a region which they knew, from Mrs. Samuels' description, to be the locality they were seeking.

Arthur had been told to inquire for the residence of Dr. Bradshaw, to visit him and secretly show him the paper that had been given him.

He had made the necessary inquiries, and, with his companion, Abner, was on his way to the doctor's house, when, in passing through a thick wood, two mounted men dashed out of the bushes in front of them, and commanded them to halt.

They did so, making no attempt at resistance, and not unprepared for such an interruption to their progress.

"Who the devil are you? and what are you doing here?" demanded a harsh voice, while two revolvers glittered before their eyes.

"We are seeking Captains Frank and Jesse James," boldly replied Arthur.

"Well, a good many before you have done the same thing, and have afterward found them to their cost. What do you want with those notorious robbers? and why are you seeking them here?"

"I asked for them, because I think they will give us protection," rejoined Arthur.

"You do, eh? Protection, eh? Who are you, then? Robbers yourselves? Do you belong to the infernal gang?"

Arthur rightly conjectured that this disparaging language was used to throw them off their guard, in case they were spies, and lead them to suppose they had met enemies of the outlaws instead of friends.

As he was about to answer, there was another loud rustling of the bushes, and two more mounted men leaped their horses into the road behind them.

Both Arthur and Abner turned their heads to look at the new arrivals, and at once recognized two of their bandit foes, Jim Cummings and Jake Blossom.

Cummings and Blossom at the same time recognized their former prisoners, and both together uttered exclamations of triumph.

"Hello, my beauties! so we've caught you again, have we?" cried Cummings.

"Do you know them, Jim?" questioned the spokesman of the two who had stopped them.

"I reckon we know them," he answered, with a short, harsh laugh. "Eh, Jake?"

"Well, I should smile," laughed Jake, in return.

"These are the two sneaking hounds that caught me, hung me, and, after being captured themselves in turn, managed to get away from us, when the — soldiers attacked us, at the time I carried off that rich prize of a girl, who hadn't any better sense than to up and die on our hands," said Cummings.

"Die?" cried Arthur, in a horrified voice, his face suddenly becoming ghastly.

"Well, yes, the fact is out now," rejoined the heartless scoundrel, with a grim smile; "but I didn't intend to tell you till I'd got all out of you I could make for her ransom. You see, I kind of forgot myself, coming on

you here so suddenly, having failed to find you in Mineville, where we've been seeking you. But no matter now. If we can't get anything out of you worth while, we will at least have the pleasure of putting you where nobody else will."

"Dead?" gasped Arthur, scarcely able to stand. "Is Myra Weldon dead?"

"Well, yes, she's dead, and that's the long and short of it," responded the ungodly villain, rejoicing in the terrible mental agony which he saw his hated foe was undergoing.

"Oh, my God! my God!" wailed the poor fellow. "Myra murdered."

"Well, murdered or not," frowned Cummings, "it's enough for all of us to know that she's dead and buried long ago."

Arthur was so overcome at this terrible disclosure that he reeled and staggered like a drunken man.

In fact, he would have fallen to the ground, only for the support of Abner's strong arms.

"Poor feller, poor feller!—bear up, bear up!" muttered the hardy scout with a tear in his eye.

"Bind and gag the two fellows, boys!" interposed Cummings, "and then we'll take what things of value they've got about them, and have a little quiet fun."

The three other men at once dismounted and prepared to execute the orders of one whom they acknowledged as a chief in the absence of their great leaders, Frank and Jesse James.

"Quick, cap—quick—show 'em the paper," said Abner.

"For your sake, yes, my friend, but not for my own," was Arthur's gloomy response.

He hastily produced the pass from a side pocket and held it out to Jim Cummings.

"There," he said to him, "read that, and then murder us if you dare."

The man took the paper and glanced at it.

He could not translate the cipher, but he recognized the signature, which seemed to make a marked impression on him.

"What the deuce is all this?" he growled, with a black frown.

"Ef yer can't read it yerself," boldly spoke up Abner, "yer'd better git somebody what kin, afore yer goes too fur in yer hellish work."

"Shut your mouth, you — fool," cried the irate outlaw, "before I shut it with a bullet."

"We demands to see yer boss leaders, either Frank or Jesse James," still boldly persisted the mountaineer.

"I'm my own boss, and will do what I like with my own prisoners," scowled Cummings, in great wrath. "I'm not going to be stopped in any work I set out to do by any — paper. Men, obey the orders I gave you!"

"Don't yer do it, don't yer tech us," cried Abner, with flashing eyes, as the outlaws advanced to execute their orders. "Afore yer puts yer hands on us, yer better l'arn what that er paper says, or it mought be the wuss for yous. I tells ye's this for yer own good."

The men seemed to hesitate, and glanced at Cummings, who at once drew a revolver and exclaimed:

"Do as I tell you, or you'll have to settle with me."

"An' I tells yous that that er paper's a pass of pected

tion from Mrs. Samuels, the mother of the Jameses. It's got her name writ to it; and ef that er don't mean nothing for yous, then call Old Ab's a square-toed liar."

"And I tell you, boys, Jim Cummings commands here, and not Mrs. Samuels, nor any other old woman. And so, bind and gag these fellows at once, and no more talk about it."

The hesitating men now started in for their work in earnest.

"Now, then," pursued their leader, with an oath, "take two more ropes and fasten each to a cantel of a saddle, so that they can keep their feet and march to their own funerals."

When this was done he wheeled his horse and bade them follow him.

Thus, in this ignominious manner, Arthur and Abner were compelled to keep along with the horses on foot, while their captors rode.

As they started off on a brisk trot, Arthur, weak and trembling, soon stumbled and fell, and was dragged along for a considerable distance.

On seeing his condition, Cummings slackened his pace to a walk, and Arthur managed to gain his feet.

Cummings did not do this because of any feeling of compassion, but because he feared his captive might die upon the road, before he should reach the place where, according to his own language, "the real fun was to begin."

After going some quarter of a mile up the road, they turned off through a bushy lot, that led down to a dismal swamp.

Here two saplings were selected at a short distance apart, and the prisoners firmly bound to them so as to face their foes.

"Now, boys," said Cummings, as he drew off to a distance of some fifteen yards, "let us all see how well we can shoot. Suppose we take off their ears first. And I'll open the ball."

"Bet you a dollar I can beat you," said Jake.

"Done."

With that he drew his revolver and took a deliberate aim at Arthur, while his followers, revolvers in hand, all watched the result with intense interest.

His aim was prolonged quite as much for the purpose of tantalizing his victim as for making sure of his mark.

Then he pulled the trigger. A flash—a—crack—and a streak of blood.

"That's his head, not his ear, and I can beat that," laughed Jake Blossom.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE KING OF OUTLAWS.

Jim Cummings had, indeed, missed his aim.

It was his intention to have cut off the left ear of Arthur Braceland, but the ball had sped too high, and, just grazing the temple and side of the head, had passed over the top of the ear.

Blossom now took his place for his own shot.

He was just in the act of leveling his revolver, when a well-known shout was heard, and the heavy tramping of horses.

"Hold!" exclaimed a well-known voice.

Each turned and looked at the others, and it was noticed that Cummings grew very pale.

The next minute four riders came dashing up, Jesse James himself in the lead.

"Well, what's all this?" he demanded, with an oath, as his cold, keen eye took in the whole situation.

No one answered instantly, but every one seemed to have a crestfallen air.

Jesse was quickly told the circumstances by one of the men.

With his revolver in his hand, and that fearful eye fixed steadily upon Jim Cummings, Jesse James now quietly dismounted and strode up to the trembling wretch, who expected nothing but instant death.

"Where is that paper now?" sternly demanded the bandit chief.

It was well for Cummings that he had not destroyed the paper, and he now produced and extended it with a hand that trembled in spite of himself.

Jesse James took the paper, and deliberately read the cipher, at the same time keeping a wary glance upon the four men, and ready to send a bullet through the heart or brain of the first one who might venture to lift a finger in the way of mutiny.

"So, with this in your hand, you deliberately took these men down here to murder them without my knowledge," he said; and every word came out distinctly and with a sound that seemed to grate upon their very hearts. "Take that, you scoundrel," he added, and with the butt of his revolver he struck Cummings a blow in the face that felled him like an ox.

Turning then upon the two ghastly and trembling fellows who had accompanied Cummings hither, he ordered them to take away the weapons of the prostrate man, mount their own horses, ride them back to their enclosure, return to the cave, and await his coming.

Then telling one of his men to watch Cummings and also James Blossom, and shoot them if they attempted to disobey his orders, he advanced to Arthur, who, together with his companion, Abner, had been witnesses of the whole proceedings, though neither had been able to utter a word, because of the gags in their mouths.

Merely glancing at the slight flesh wound of Arthur, and seeing that it was nothing serious, Jesse cut his cords and removed the gag from his mouth.

"You came hither with a pass from my mother, to seek me?" observed Jesse.

"I did, sir, but that man yonder, whom I see you have punished, completely disregarded it, and would have murdered us but for your timely arrival. I thank you, Jesse James, for this release, but more for my friend's sake than my own."

"And why more for his sake than your own?" questioned the outlaw, in some surprise.

"Because he desires life and I do not."

"And why do you not desire life?"

"Because that man yonder has assured me that Myra Weldon is dead, and I have little desire to survive her."

"Yours is certainly a great devotion," returned Jesse, with a slight softening of his usually stern face. "And bloody butcher, as no doubt you believe me to be, I understand more of it than you probably imagine. But enough of that."

He then turned away and cut the bonds of Abner

Bliss, who expressed his thanks in his characteristic way.

"You, too, seem to be dodging death like a cat," said Jesse, with a grim smile.

"Yes, Cap'in Jeems, I've ben in some purty tight fixes in my time, and some of 'em war orful close skinning through."

"Well, you and your young friend have just had another here. If it had not been for the precaution of my good mother, in sending me word by special messenger, I should not have been on the lookout for you, and your fate might never have been known."

Then, turning to Arthur, he quietly resumed:

"You were to see Dr. Bradshaw, mother says?"

"We were on our way to his dwelling when stopped."

"Had you any important business to transact with him?"

"It was only, as I understood Mrs. Samuels, to be guided to you, sir."

"You wished to see me, especially in person?"

"Yes, I did, for I believed Myra Weldon to be living, and was authorized by her father to pay the ransom you had asked, two hundred thousand dollars for her safe return."

"Indeed? Is the father still living?"

"Yes, he was saved from the burning house."

"Did Cummings know this?"

"I don't know. He said he had been to Mineville to seek me, in the hope of securing a ransom for the young lady, before I should get knowledge of her death."

"The infernal scoundrel," muttered Jesse. "Does Cummings now know of the proposition you came to make to me?"

"I have never told any one before; I did not even mention it to your mother."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Yes."

"Then swear, by all you love, by the soul of Myra Weldon, that you will not tell it to another."

"I so swear."

"And your friend here?"

"I will vouch for him with my life."

"And you two also swear on your sacred love and honor, that nothing you shall see, or hear, in this region, shall be made known to any other human being; and that you will neither guide in person nor, in any way, give the least direction by which any living being can find this locality."

After both men had bound themselves by this oath Arthur asked:

"And now Captain James, may I ask you how Myra died?"

"She was stricken down by a raging fever. I sent for a skillful physician to prescribe for her, and for my wife to nurse her. Some three weeks from that time the doctor stood beside her bed and pronounced her dead. Do you wish for the body?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Squire Weldon will ransom the body of his child."

"It has been so preserved that it appears much as it did before the fatal event. Do you wish to see it?"

"Yes," gasped Arthur.

"Come with me, then, and don't forget your oaths of secrecy."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

WAS IT SORCERY?

Just before reaching the defile that led up the mountain, Arthur and Abner were blindfolded.

They were then conducted to the cave on foot.

The bandages were not removed for some time; not, in fact, until they had been separated and placed in different compartments.

Arthur had been alone a while, when the door suddenly opened, and a woman whom he knew at once was Mrs. James entered. She took a seat opposite Arthur and at once came directly to the subject nearest to his heart.

She proceeded to tell him of the illness of Myra Weldon, and of the constant attention and care she had received, till the fatal words had been pronounced by her physician:

"She is dead."

"During this illness," continued Mrs. James, "my husband and I, being by the side of Miss Weldon night and day, had come to regard her with a sincere affection; and we decided to keep the body in the cavern till such time as we might notify her friends and have it delivered into their care."

"We are grateful at least for this. Has such notice ever been sent to Mineville?"

"No, and for a reason that you may some time understand."

"I think I do now, Mrs. James."

"And to what reason do you attribute it?"

"There has probably been no arrangement made for ransoming her dead body. A vast sum——"

He suddenly stopped, with a rapid change of color and countenance, as he caught himself in the act of making known what he had so solemnly and sacredly sworn to Jesse James not to reveal to another living soul—namely, the large sum of two hundred thousand dollars, which her father had pledged himself to pay for her safe return to his loving arms.

"A vast sum, as I said, may be required for the transfer of her body to her friends."

"I know nothing of that; that is business for the men to settle; but I know that that is not the cause of our keeping her here for this length of time."

"May I ask, then, what it is?"

"Strange enough, perhaps, you will think the fact when I tell you she has never shown signs of decay."

Arthur sprang to his feet in great excitement.

"Then!" he cried, "she may yet be alive. Perhaps she's only in a cataleptic state. I've heard of such things. You have not buried her, she is where she can breathe fresh pure air?"

"Certainly we have not buried her, not having seen any certain signs of decay. But on the other hand, we must assure you that she is in no cataleptic condition. Why, it has been weeks since the doctor pronounced her dead, and whoever heard of a cataleptic subject remaining weeks in the death trance?"

"Madam, let me tell you that there is no time limit to these strange freaks of nature, and I have dared to think it possible that she may yet live. Lead me to her at once."

She led the way from the room, through a long, narrow

row, dark, winding passage, and at last came to a door, which opened into a very large room.

This was only lighted now by one lamp, at the far end, and much of it was in shadow.

As the two moved slowly forward, Arthur all eyes of anxious wonder and secret hope, they came to the alcove, now closed by heavy velvet drapery.

The woman drew aside one of the folds, and, turning to Arthur, said, somewhat dramatically:

"Look! Behold!"

He sprang eagerly forward, and the next moment he staggered back with upraised hands, and wild, glaring eyes, that seemed to be starting from their sockets.

Then, from within the alcove, there came a piercing shriek, and a white form rose up in the bright light and sank down again.

"Great Heaven!" gasped Arthur; "it is the disembodied spirit of Myra Weldon, or else her living, breathing human self."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

BACK TO LIFE AND LOVE.

It was, in truth, her living, breathing human self.

As each thus gazed upon the other, both seemed for the time paralyzed.

Was it now a reality or a dream?

For several minutes neither spoke.

A peculiar laugh soon rang in their ears, and brought them to the realities of mortal life, and looking up they beheld the blood-stained man of crime standing near them.

"Well, young man," he said, "what do you think now? Didn't I tell you you'd find your sweetheart looking much as she did in life?"

"Jesse James, what wonder is this?"

"Perhaps you don't think now that she really did die?" smiled Jesse.

"I certainly don't understand it."

"The doctor pronounced her dead, and we all believed so."

At length, with a slight compression of his firm lips, and a peculiar gleam from his usually cold eyes, he said:

"Young man, at the time we separated in the wilderness, when the sudden appearance of hostile soldiers caused me to depart in too much haste for formal leave-taking, I was demanding two hundred thousand dollars for the safe return of Myra Weldon to her friends and home. Since then things have so altered that my mind is changed, and I now decline to fix a ransom for her."

Arthur started and turned deadly pale.

Myra clasped her hands and sank back, half-fainting.

Mrs. James turned in surprise, and fixed her dark, bright eyes upon the face of her husband.

"You will not agree to her ransom, Captain James?" gasped Arthur.

"I have said, sir, I will not."

"Oh, Jesse!" exclaimed his wife.

"No use of further words; you know me."

Myra was still weak from her late illness, and this shock almost overpowered her.

"No," pursued the crime-steeped leader of outlaws, "I will not permit Myra Weldon to be ransomed. I have taken a fancy to her, and it is not every one I fancy. And no money consideration on earth shall ever induce me to part with her."

Was Jesse James, after all, a human fiend, to gloat over the misery of those he claimed to look upon as friends?

"I have said," he concluded, "that no money consideration will ever induce me to part with Miss Weldon. But——" and here he made a long pause and looked peculiarly at each—"I did not say I would not set her free, without money and without price."

It is needless to say that his decision was as welcome as unlooked for, and that was, we believe, one of the very few happy moments in the long career of horrid crime in the eventful life of Jesse James.

It was necessary, in order to carry out the design of the outlaw chief, that there should be a good deal of secret management.

There was soon a grand wedding in the rebuilt mansion of Squire Weldon, and Arthur and Myra were the contracting parties.

The wild, bloody career of Frank and Jesse James still went forward, and many a report of their daring deeds and crimes reached the ears of our three friends, who had had so much cause to remember one of them, and who, when they afterward heard him denounced as one of the worst villains on the face of the earth, kept strangely silent.

Though no ransom was directly paid for the abducted heiress, both the wife and mother of the outlawed Jesse James subsequently received more than one present of great value from an unknown source; while Abner Bliss, almost from the moment of his return to Mineville, found himself put in a financial position beyond all future worldly wants.

The seal of silence placed upon the lips of Myra Weldon, Arthur Braceland and Abner Bliss, having long since been removed, we are now permitted to record this singular episode in the life of Jesse James.

TO BE CONTINUED.

YOUR OPINIONS OF FAMOUS MEN.

Grand Prize Contest



22 VALUABLE PRIZES
GIVEN AWAY.

Here is a chance for every reader of **JESSE JAMES WEEKLY**.

Boys, you have all heard of the plucky little Kansan who has been making himself famous on the other side of the world.

What do you think of him?

What characteristics do you see in his face?

What has he done, anyway?

What do you think is the best thing he ever did?

The boys who can best answer such questions applying to any famous American, known for his brave deeds, will win handsome prizes.

Here is the plan of one of the most novel contests ever placed before the American boys.

Look up what interesting facts you can find about any famous American. Then write them out in your own words, stating your own opinion of him, his appearance, and the particular achievement which pleases you the most. The first prize will be awarded to the person sending in the most interesting and best written article; the next best will win the second prize, and so on. It makes no difference how short they are, but no contribution must be longer than 500 words.

LOOK AT THE PRIZES.

TWO FIRST PRIZES

The two who send us the most interesting and best written articles will each receive a first-class Camera, complete with achromatic lens, and loaded with six exposures each. Absolutely ready for use. For square pictures $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; capacity six exposures without reloading; size of camera $4\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2} \times 5$ inches; weight 15 ounces; well made, covered with grain leather and handsomely finished.

FIVE SECOND PRIZES

The five who send us the next best articles will each receive a "Sterling" Magic Lantern Outfit, together with 72 admission tickets and a large show bill. Each lantern is 10 inches high, 4 inches in diameter, with a $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch plano-complex condensing lens and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch double complex objective lens. Uses kerosene oil only.

FIVE THIRD PRIZES

The five who send us the next best articles will each receive a Handsome Pearl Handled Knife. These knives have each four blades of the best English steel, hardened and tempered. The handle is pearl, the lining brass, and the bolsters German silver.

For ten next best descriptions, ten sets of the latest and most entertaining Puzzles and Novelties on the market, numbering three puzzles each, including Uncle Isaac's Pawnshop Puzzle; the Magic Marble Puzzle and the Demon Outfit.

This Contest closes December 1. All contributions must be in by that date.

SEND IN YOUR ARTICLES AT ONCE, BOYS

We are going to publish all of the best ones during the progress of the Contest.

We will have to reserve to ourselves the right of judging which article has the most merit, but our readers know that they may depend upon Street & Smith, on their absolute fairness and justice in conducting our tests. This one will be no exception to the rule.

REMEMBER!

Whether your contribution wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with the name of the writer.

To become a contestant for the prize you must cut out the **Character Contest Coupon**, printed in this issue. Use it out properly, and send it to **JESSE JAMES WEEKLY**, of Street & Smith, 238 William Street, New York City, together with your article. No contribution will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

COUPON.

"JESSE JAMES WEEKLY" CHARACTER CONTEST No. _____

Date..... 1904

Name.....

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CHARACTER PRIZE CONTEST.

During the progress of the Prize Character Contest this department will be devoted to the publication of the best articles sent in by the contestants.

Here are some of the best ones received this week.

The Naval Hero of the Civil War.

(By Thos. Murphy, Chicago, Ill.)

Farragut, the naval hero of the Civil War, has always been my favorite. Every time I read the account of the passage of the blockade on the Mississippi, at the siege of Vicksburg, it thrills me more and more.

I have been looking it up again, and will enclose an article about it.

Soon after the war began the Government had an important project in hand. The Mississippi River was largely in the control of the Confederacy, and was the great highway for transporting her supplies. New Orleans was the richest city of the South, receiving for shipment at this time \$92,000,000 worth of cotton and more than \$25,000,000 worth of sugar yearly. If this city could be captured, and the river controlled by the North, the South would be seriously crippled.

But the lower Mississippi was guarded by the strongest forts, Jackson and St. Philip, which mounted 115 guns, and were garrisoned by 1,500 men. Above the forts were fifteen vessels of the Confederate fleet, including the ironclad ram, Manassas, and just below, a heavy chain across the river bound together scores ofypress logs thirty feet long, and four or five feet in diameter, thus forming an immense obstruction. Sharpshooters were stationed all along the banks.

Farragut was chosen to undertake the capture of this stronghold. Several naval officers were considered, but Adonias Jones, Secretary of the Navy, said, "Farragut is the man." The steam sloop-of-war, Hartford, of 1,900 tons burden, and 225 feet long, was made ready as his flagship. His instructions were, "The certain capture of the city of New Orleans. The Department and the country require of you success. . . . If successful, you will open the way to the sea for the Great West, never again to be closed. The rebellion will be riven in the center, and the flag, to which you have been so faithful, will recover its supremacy in every State."

With a grateful heart that he had been thought fitting for this high place, and believing in his ability to win

success, at sixty-one years of age he started on his mission. He took with him six sloops-of-war, sixteen gunboats, twenty-one schooners, and five other vessels, forty-eight in all, the fleet carrying over 200 guns.

April 18, 1862, they had all reached their positions and were ready for the struggle. For six days and nights the mortars kept up a constant fire on Fort Jackson, throwing nearly 6,000 shells. Many persons were killed, but the fort did not yield. The Confederates sent down the river five fire rafts, flat boats filled with dry wood, smeared with tar and turpentine, hoping that these would make havoc among Farragut's ships; but his crews towed them away to shore, or let them drift to sea.

Farragut now made up his mind to pass the forts at all hazards. It was a dangerous and heroic step. If he won New Orleans must fall; if he failed——. But he must not fail. Two gunboats were sent to cut the chain across the river. All night long the commander watched with intense anxiety the return of the boats which under a galling fire had succeeded in breaking the chain, and thus making a passage for the fleet.

At half-past three o'clock on the morning of April 24, the fleet was ready to start. The Cayuga led off the first division of eight vessels. Both forts opened fire. In ten minutes she had passed beyond St. Philip only to be surrounded by eleven Confederate gunboats. The Varuna came to her relief, but was rammed by two Southern boats, and sank in fifteen minutes. The Mississippi encountered the enemy's ram, Manassas, riddled her with shot, and set her on fire, so that she drifted below the forts and blew up.

Then the center division, led by the Hartford, passed into the terrific fire. First she grounded in avoiding a fire raft; then a Confederate ram pushed a raft against her, setting her on fire; but Farragut gave his orders as calmly as though not in the utmost peril. The flames were extinguished, and she steamed on, doing terrible execution with her shells. Then came the last division, led by the Sciota, and Commander Porter's gunboats.

In the darkness, lighted only by the flashes of over 200 guns, the fleet had cut its way to victory, losing 184 in killed and wounded.

General Sheridan in the Shenandoah.

(By Charles Kraus, 15 years old, Dushore, Pa.)

General Philip H. Sheridan was in command of the Army of the Upper Potomac, consisting of nearly 40,000 men. On the 19th of September he came upon General Early's army at Winchester and defeated them. On the 22d he overtook the defeated army at Fishers' Hill, assaulted Early in his entrenchments, and gained another victory. Sheridan then turned about to ravage the valley. The work was fearfully well done; and with torch, ax and sword there was nothing left worth fighting for between the Blue Ridge and Alleghanies. Sheridan then posted his army at Cedar Creek and then went to Washington. Early then rallied his shattered forces, and on the 19th of October surprised the Union forces and captured the artillery and sent the routed troops flying toward Winchester. The Confederates followed as far as Middletown and stopped. On the previous night Sheridan had started back to Winchester to rejoin his army. On his way he heard the firing and rode twelve miles at full speed and then met his panic-stricken troops, rallied them with a word, and they turned upon the astonished Confederates and gained one of the most signal victories of the war. Early's army was disorganized and ruined. Such was the end of the strife in the valley of the Shenandoah. On the 22d of February, General Sheridan, who had removed from the Shenandoah, gained a victory over the forces of General Early at Waynesborough and then found the commander-in-chief at Petersburg.

Sheridan pressed on by the left bank in the direction of Deatonville, up by the way of the South Side Railroad. Lee then fell back to Deatonville, where a battle was fought in which Ewell's division, 6,000 strong, was captured by Sheridan. The main army, however, escaped to Farmville.

Admiral Schley.

(By Charles E. Bowers, Hanover, Pa.)

Admiral Schley is my greatest favorite, from the word go. We hear so much about him these days, especially from the Court of Inquiry, where men are trying to dub him as a coward. Why are they doing this? This man has often shown his bravery during the late years, especially during the war with Spain, at the destruction of Admiral Cervera's fleet, and during the Civil War, when he was with such brave men as Farragut and Porter, on the Mississippi River and at the siege of Port Hudson.

Later he was sent to Peru, where he greatly distinguished himself in a fight with the coolies on the Chiuchia Islands.

In 1871, when he was a lieutenant-commander, he found himself in a fight with the Koreans, who were entrenched in a strongly defended fort. But Schley was the second man on the wall which was taken by storm after a great struggle.

What did the people of the United States think of Schley the day of the Fourth of July, 1898, the day after that engagement? Why, they went almost wild with enthusiasm and delight at his great accomplishment.

That is just a small part of his bravery which he is connected with, and now they are accusing him of cowardice. Why, if that would be the case of Admiral Schley what would character amount to in this world? Why, absolutely nothing.

This is enough to say that Schley ought not to be accused as a coward, but as one of our greatest heroes of 1901.

In 1884 Commander Schley was chosen out of all the officers of the navy to command an expedition sent to the Arctic for the relief of the Greeley expedition. This was the first time he was ever in that region, but he laid the plans and equipped his own expedition, and forced his way to Cape Sabine, a month earlier than was ever before accomplished. For this exploit Schley was made chief of the Bureau of Equipment. In 1891 he was in command of the Baltimore, at Valpariso, when several of his men were killed and others wounded in a riot at that place. His nerve and coolness saved us from a war with Chili.

When Commodore Schley made his report to Admiral Sampson on July 6, 1898, he said, "I have the 'honor' to make the following report of that part of the squadron under your command, but which came under my observation during the engagement with the Spanish fleet July 3, 1898, etc."

His battleship, the Brooklyn, being in the thickest of the fight, showed that he was a man with great nerve and tact.

The Friend of the Slaves.

(By William Stanley, Springfield, Mass.)

I have often heard my grandfather tell of William Lloyd Garrison, one of those brave and famous men who got hooted and jeered and mobbed for speaking against slavery before the Civil War. So I thought I would write you an article about him and become a contestant in your prize contest.

One of the bravest things he ever did was to put the following motto at the head of his newspaper, *The Liberator*. This was at the time when people were commencing to listen to him and the Southerners to hate him. It was as follows: "I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject I do not wish to speak with moderation. I am in earnest, and I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard."

The North was bound hand and foot by the slave trade almost as effectually as the South. The great plea was the fear lest the Union would be dissolved.

Some thought it would not be safe to free the slaves; that assassinations would be the result. The real secret, however, was that each slave meant several hundred dollars, and freedom meant poverty to the masters. Meantime, the *Liberator* was making itself felt, despite Garrison's poverty. The Vigilance Association of South Carolina offered a reward of \$1,500 for the apprehension and prosecution of any white person who might be detected in distributing or circulating it.

Soon Georgia passed a law offering \$5,000 to any person arresting and bringing to trial under the laws of the State, and punishing to conviction, the editor or publisher of the *Liberator*. What a wonder that some ruffian at midnight did not break into the little office in Boston where he worked and lived, and drag the young man off to a slave vessel lying close by in the harbor! Twelve "fanatics" gathered one stormy night in the basement of an African church in Boston, and organized the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832.

The contest over the slavery question was growing extremely bitter. Prudence Craudall of Canterbury, Conn., a young Quaker lady, admitted several colored girls to her school, who came from Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The people were indignant at such a commingling of races. Shopkeepers refused to sell her anything; her well was filled with refuse, and at last her house was nearly torn down by a midnight mob. Lane Theological Seminary, Cincinnati; Western Reserve College, Hudson, Ohio, with some others, were nearly broken up by the conflict of opinion. Some anti-slavery lecturers were tarred and feathered or thrown into prison. In New York, a pro-slavery mob broke in the doors and windows of a Presbyterian church, and laid waste schoolhouses and dwellings of colored people. In Philadelphia, the riots lasted three days, forty-four houses of colored people being nearly or quite destroyed.

In Boston, a "most respectable" mob, composed, says Horace Greeley, "in good part of merchants," dispersed a company of women belonging to the Female Anti-Slavery Society, while its president was engaged in prayer. Learning that Garrison was in the adjoining office, they shouted, "We must have Garrison! Out with him! Lynch him!"

Attempting to escape by the advice of the mayor, who was present, he sought refuge in a carpenter's shop, but the crowd drew him out, and coiling a rope around his body, dragged him bareheaded along the street. One man called out, "He shan't be hurt; he is an American!" and this probably saved his life, though many blows were aimed at his head, and his clothes were nearly torn from his body. The mayor declaring that he could only be saved by being lodged in jail, Garrison pressed into a hack and was driven as rapidly as possible

to the prison, the maddened crowd clinging to the wheels, dashing against the doors, and seizing hold of the horses. At last he was behind the bars and out of their reach. On the walls of his cell he wrote:

"William Lloyd Garrison was put into this cell on Wednesday afternoon, October 21, 1835, to save him from the violence of a respectable and influential mob, who sought to destroy him for preaching the abominable and dangerous doctrine that 'all men are created equal,' and that all oppression is odious in the sight of God. Confine me as a prisoner, but bind me not as a slave. Punish me as a criminal, but hold me not as a chattel. Torture me as a man, but drive me not like a beast. Doubt my sanity, but acknowledge my immortality."

The "respectable" mob had wrought wiser than they knew. Garrison and his *Liberator* became more widely known than ever.

From this time till 1860 the struggle between freedom and slavery was continuous.

Garrison was opposed to war; but after the firing on Sumter, April 12, 1861, it was inevitable. For two years after Abraham Lincoln's election to the Presidency, Garrison waited impatiently for that pen stroke which set four million human beings free. When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued January 1, 1863, Garrison's lifework was accomplished. Thirty-five years of untiring, heroic struggle had not been in vain. When two years later the stars and stripes were raised again over Fort Sumter, he was invited by President Lincoln, as a guest of the government, to witness the imposing scene. When Mr. Garrison arrived in Charleston the colored people were nearly wild with joy. Children sang and men shouted. A slave made an address of welcome, his two daughters bearing a wreath of flowers to their great benefactor.

Hobson's Courageous Deed.

(By George Alter, Philadelphia, Pa.)

In my opinion, one of the most esteemed heroes of the Spanish-American War is Lieutenant Richmond Pearson Hobson.

When Admiral Sampson blocked up the entrance to Santiago Harbor, where Cervera's fleet was, Lieutenant Hobson, a young officer of the flagship New York, asked permission to undertake an experiment which seemed to everybody like rushing into the very jaws of death.

With the help of seven sailors as daring as himself, he tried to sink the American coal barge Merrimac across the entrance to Santiago Bay, but he was detected by the Spaniards and was fired upon. The rudder of the Merrimac was shot away and it failed to block the entrance. Hobson and his followers were also captured, but were later on exchanged for Spanish prisoners which the Americans had.

Hunting and Trapping Department.

This department is brimful of information and ideas of interest to the young trapper and hunter. Write us if you have any questions to ask concerning these subjects, and they will be answered in a special column. Address all communications to the "Hunting and Trapping Department."

How to Trap Wildcats.

This animal is one of the most widespread species of the cat tribe, being found not only in America, but throughout nearly the whole of Europe, as well as in Northern Asia. In many parts of the United States, where the wildcat was wont to flourish, it has become exterminated, owing to civilization and the destruction of forest lands.

Many naturalists are of the opinion that the wildcat is the original progenitor of our domestic cat, but there is much difference of opinion in regard to the subject. Although they bear great resemblance to each other, there are several points of distinction between the two; one of the most decided differences being in the comparative length of the tails. The tail of the wildcat is little more than half the length of that of the domestic cat, and much more bushy.

The color of the wild animal is much more uniform than in the great raft of "domestic" mongrel specimens which make night hideous with their discordant yowls, although we sometimes see a high-bred individual which, if his tail was cut off at half its length, might easily pass as an example of the wild variety.

The ground tint of the fur in the wildcat is yellowish gray, diversified with dark streaks over the body and limbs, much after the appearance of the so-called "tiger cat." A row of dark streaks and spots extends along the spine, and the tail is thick, short and bushy, tipped with black and encircled with a number of rings of a dark hue. In some individuals the markings are less distinct, and they are sometimes altogether wanting, but in the typical wildcat they are quite prominent. The fur is rather long and thick, particularly so during the winter season, and always in the colder northern regions.

The amount of havoc which these creatures often occasion is surprising, and their nocturnal inroads in poultry yards and sheepfolds, render them most hated pests to farmers in the countries where these animals abound. They seem to have a special appetite for the

heads of fowls, and will often decapitate half-a-dozen in a single night, leaving the bodies in otherwise good condition to tell the story of their midnight murders. The home of the wildcat is made in some cleft of rock, or in the hollow of some aged tree, from which the creatures issues in the dark hours and starts upon its marauding excursions. Its family numbers from three to six, and the female parent is smaller than the male, the total length of the latter being three feet.

Inhabiting the most lonely and inaccessible ranges of rock and mountain, the wildcat is seldom seen during the daytime. At night, like its domestic relative, he prowls far and wide, walking with the same stealthy step and hunting his game in the same tiger-like manner. He is by no means a difficult animal to trap, being easily deceived and taking a bait without any hesitation. The wildcat haunts the shores of lakes and rivers, and it is here that the traps may be set for them.

Having caught and killed one of the colony, the rest of them can be easily taken if the body of the dead victim be left near their hunting ground and surrounded with the traps carefully set and concealed beneath leaves, moss, or the like.

Every wildcat that is in the neighborhood will be certain to visit the body, and if the traps are rightly arranged many will be caught. A good-sized steel trap is generally used. We would caution the young trapper in his approach to an entrapped wildcat, as the strength and ferocity of this animal under such circumstances, or when otherwise "hard pressed," is perfectly amazing. When caught in a trap they spring with terrible fury at any one who approaches them, not waiting to be assailed, and when cornered or hemmed in by a hunter they will often turn upon their pursuer, and springing at his face will attack him with most consummate fury, often inflicting serious and sometimes fatal wounds. When hunted and attacked by dogs, the wildcat is a most desperate and untiring fighter, and extremely difficult to kill, for which reason it has been truthfully said that "if a tame cat has nine lives, a wildcat must have a dozen."

Hints on Baiting the Steel Trap.

There is a very common and erroneous idea current among amateur sportsmen and others in regard to the baiting of the steel trap, viz., that the pan of the trap is intended for the bait.

This was the old custom in the traps of bygone times, but no modern trap is intended to be so misused, and would indeed often defeat its object in such a case, wherein it will be easily seen. The object of the professional trapper is the acquisition of furs; and a prime fur skin should be without break or bruise from nose to tail. A trap set as above described would of course catch its victim by the head or neck, and the fur would be more or less injured at the very spot where it should be particularly free from blemish.

The true object of the steel trap is that it shall take the animal by the leg, thus injuring the skin only in a part where it is totally valueless.

We give, then, this imperative rule: Never bait a steel trap on the pan.

The pan is intended for the foot of the game, and in order to insure capture by this means the bait should be so placed as that the attention of the animal will be drawn away from the trap, the latter being in such a position as will cause the victim to step in it when reaching for the tempting allurement. There are several ways of doing this, one of which we here illustrate:

A pen of stakes, in the shape of the letter V, is first constructed. The trap is then set in the angle, and the bait attached to the end stake directly over it.

How to Trap Rabbits.

The rabbit, or "cotton tail," as he is familiarly termed, is too well-known to need any description here. From Maine to Texas our woods abound with these fleet-footed little creatures, of which there are several American species. They are the swiftest of all American quadrupeds, and have been known to clear over twenty feet in a single leap. They are all natural burrowers, although they often forego the trouble of excavating a home when one can be found already made, and which can be easily modified or adopted to their purposes. The common rabbit of New England often makes its home or "form" beneath a pile of brush or logs, or in crevices in rocks. Here it brings forth its young, of which there are often three or four litters a year. The creature becomes a parent at a very early age, and by the time that a rabbit is a year old it may have attained the dignity of a grandparent.

The food of the rabbit consists of grasses, bark, leaves, bulbs, young twigs, buds, berries and the like, and of

cultivated vegetables of all kinds, when opportunity favors. When surprised in the woods it manifests its alarm by violently striking the ground with its feet, causing the peculiar sound so often noticed at their first jump. The animal is fond of pursuing a beaten path in the woods, and is often snared at such places. Its enemies, beside man, are the lynx, and other carnivorous animals, hawks, owls, and even the domestic cat.

The rabbit is a favorite game with all amateur sportsmen, and the devices used in its capture are multitudinous. It is by no means a difficult animal to trap.

The self-setting trap described in last week's issue, and the "double ender," also described last week, are effective where the animal is desired to be taken alive. If this is not an object, the snare is to be recommended as simple in construction and sure in its result.

The above constitute the only devices commonly used for the capture of the rabbit, the steel trap being dispensed with.

The skin of the rabbit is very thin and tender, and should be carefully removed.

The Pendant Box Trap.

This trap when properly made and set will prove an excellent device for the capture of small birds.

A thin wooden box is the first requisite, it should be about a foot square and six inches in depth, and supplied with a close fitting cover, working on hinges. The sides should then be perforated with a few auger holes for purposes of ventilation. The box is to be hung from one end and one of the sides serves as the cover. The hinges of this cover are at the top of the box, so that the cover swings perpendicularly.

Two elastics are next in order, and they should be attached to the cover and box, one on each side. They should be drawn to a strong tension, so as to hold the cover firmly against the box.

The mechanism of the trap centers in the bait stick, which differs in construction from any other described in this department.

It should be made about the size of a lead pencil and eleven inches or so in length, depending of course upon the size of the box.

It should then be divided in two pieces by a perfectly flat cut, the longer part being six inches in length. This piece should be attached to the back board of the box by a small string and a tack, its end being bluntly pointed. Its attachment should be about five inches above the bottom board, and in the exact center of the width of the back.

Near the flat end of the other piece the bait consisting

of a berry or other fruit, should be secured, and the further extremity of the stick should then be rounded to a blunt point. The trap is now easily set. Raise the lid and lift the long stick to a horizontal position. Adjust the flat end of the bait stick against that of the former, and allow the pressure of the lid to bear against the blunt point of the short stick, a straight dent being made in the cover to receive it, as also in the back of the box for the other piece. If properly constructed, this pressure will be sufficient to hold the sticks end to end and the trap is thus set. The slightest weight on the false perch thus made will throw the parts asunder, and the cover closes with a snap.

The greatest difficulties in constructing the trap will be found in the bearings of the bait sticks, the ends of which must be perfectly flat and join snugly, in order to hold themselves together. The box may now be suspended in a tree by the aid of a string at the top. The first bird that makes bold enough to alight on the perch is a sure captive, and is secured without harm. If desired, the elastic may be attached to the inside of the cover, extending to the back of the box.

Bird Lime.

This substance so called which is sold in our bird marts under that name, is a sticky preparation, closely resembling a very thick and gummy varnish. It is astonishingly sticky, and the slightest quantity between the fingers will hold them together with remarkable tenacity. What its effect must be on the feathers of a bird can easily be imagined.

This preparation is put up in boxes of different sizes and may be had from any of the bird fanciers in any of our large towns or cities.

Should a home made article be required, an excellent substitute may be prepared from the inner bark of the "slippery elm."

This should be gathered in the spring or early summer, cut into very small pieces or scraped into threads, and boiled in water sufficient to cover them until the pieces are soft and easily mashed. By this time the water will be pretty much boiled down, and the whole mass should then be poured into a mortar and beaten up, adding at the same time a few grains of wheat. When done, the paste thus made may be put into an earthen vessel and kept. When required to be used, it should be melted or softened over the fire, adding goose grease or linseed oil, instead of water. When of the proper consistency it may be spread upon sticks or twigs prepared for it, and which should afterward be placed in the locality selected for the capture of the birds.

An excellent bird lime may be made also from plain linseed oil by boiling it down until it becomes thick and gummy. Thick varnish either plain or mixed with oil, but always free from alcohol, also answers the purpose

very well. The limed twigs may be either set in trees or placed on poles and stuck in the ground.

If any of our readers chance to become possessed of an owl, they may look forward to grand success with their limed twigs. It is a well known fact in natural history that the owl is the universal enemy of nearly all our smaller birds. And when, as often happens, a swarm of various birds are seen flying frantically from limb to limb, seeming to center on a particular tree, and filling the air with their loud chirping, it may be safely concluded that some sleepy owl has been surprised in his day-doing, and is being severely pecked and punished for his nightly depredations.

Profiting from this fact, the bird catcher often utilizes the owl with great success. Fastening the bird in the crotch of some tree, he adjusts the limed twigs on all sides, even covering the neighboring branches with the gummy substance. No sooner is the owl spied by one bird than the cry is set up, and a score of foes are soon at hand, ready for battle. One by one they alight on the beguiling twigs, and one by one find themselves held fast. The more they flutter the more powerless they become, and the more securely are they held. In this way many valuable and rare birds are often captured.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. R. T.—One of the best "scents" is made of a mixture of assafoetida, musk, oil of anise, and fish oil, together with a few drops of the oil of rhodium, is especially recommended by our most skilled trappers. This preparation contains the various substances which are known to attract the different fur bearing animals, and its use often insures success where any one of the simple substances would be ineffectual.

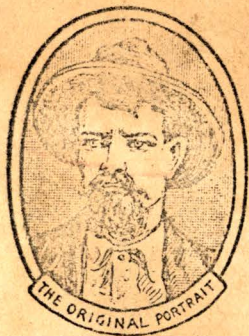
The object of the "trail" consists in offering a leading scent which, when followed, will bring the animal to the various traps, and when properly made will be the means of drawing large numbers of game from all quarters and from great distances, whereas without it the traps might remain undiscovered.

Trails are sometimes made to connect a line of traps, as when set along the banks of streams for mink, etc., at other times, as in trapping the fox, for instance, they should extend from the trap on all sides like the spokes of a wheel from the hub, thus covering considerable area, and rendering success more certain than it would be without this precaution.

The combination "medicine" just described is excellent for the purposes of a trail for minks, otter, muskrat, and many other animals.

Soak a piece of meat, or piece of wood in the preparation, and drag it along the ground between the traps. A dead fish smeared with the fluid will also answer the same purpose. The soles of the boots may also be smeared with the "medicine," and the trail thus accomplished.

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